

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS



F. HOPKINSON SMITH

75
20374

Library

St. Olaf College

Northfield, Minn.

COLONEL CARTER'S
CHRISTMAS



Katy dropped her head on his shoulder again.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

BY

F. HOPKINSON SMITH

ILLUSTRATED

BY

F. C. YOHN



CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

NEW YORK :: 1903

702.464
1903

Copyright, 1903, by
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

Published, October, 1903



To my Readers :

IT will be remembered, doubtless, that the chronicles of my very dear friend, Colonel Carter (published some years ago), make mention of but one festival of importance,—a dinner given at Carter Hall, near Cartersville, Virginia; the Colonel's ancestral home. This dinner, as you already know, was to celebrate two important events,—the sale to the English syndicate of the coal lands, the exclusive property of the Colonel's beloved aunt, Miss Nancy Carter; and the instantaneous transfer by that generous woman of all the purchase money to the Colonel's slender bank account: a transaction which, to quote his own words as he gallantly drank her health in acknowledgment of the gift, "enabled him to provide for one of the loveliest of

[v]

TO MY READERS

her sex,—she who graces our boa'd—and to enrich her declining days not only with all the comforts, but with many of the luxuries she was bawn to enjoy."

Several other festivals, however, did take place: not in the days of the dear Colonel's prosperity, nor yet at Carter Hall, but in his impecunious days in New York, while he was still living in the little house on Bedford Place within a stone's throw of the tall clock-tower of Jefferson Market. This house, you will recall, sat back from the street behind a larger and more modern dwelling, its only outlet to the main thoroughfare being through a narrow, grewsome tunnel, lighted during the day by a half-moon sawed out in the swinging gate which marked its street entrance, and illumined at night by a rusty lantern with dingy glass sides.

All reference to one of these festivals—

TO MY READERS

a particular and most important festival—was omitted, much to my regret, from my published chronicles, owing to the express commands of the Colonel himself: commands issued not only out of consideration for the feelings of one of the participants—a man who had been challenged by him to mortal duel, and therefore his enemy—but because on that joyous occasion this same offender was his guest, and so protected by his hospitality.

This man was no less a person than the eminent financier, Mr. P. A. Klutchem, of Klutchem, Skinham & Co., who, you will remember, had in an open office and in the presence of many mutual friends, denounced in unmeasured terms the Cartersville & Warrentown Air Line Railroad—an enterprise to which the Virginian had lent his name and which, with the help of his friend Mr. Fitzpatrick, he was

TO MY READERS

then trying to finance. Not content with thus slandering the road itself, characterizing it as "beginning nowhere and ending nowhere," Mr. Klutchem had even gone so far as to attack the good name of its securities, known as the "Garden Spot" Bonds, and to state boldly that he would not "give a yellow dog" for "enough of 'em to paper a church." The Colonel's immediate resentment of this insult; his prompt challenge to Mr. Klutchem to meet him in mortal duel; Mr. Klutchem's refusal and the events which followed, are too well known to you to need further reference here.

The death of this Mr. Klutchem some years ago decided me again to seek the Colonel's permission to lay before my readers a succinct account, first of what led up to this most important celebration, and then of some of the details of the

TO MY READERS

celebration itself,—one of the most delightful, if not the most delightful, of all the many delightful festivals held in the Colonel's cosy quarters on Bedford Place.

My communication drew from Colonel Carter the following characteristic letter:

CARTER HALL, CARTERSVILLE, VA.,

MY DEAR MAJOR:

I have your very kind and welcome letter, and am greatly impressed by the views you hold. I was averse at the time to any reference being made to the matter to which you so kindly refer, for the reason that some men are often more sensitive over their virtues than they are over their faults.

Mr. Klutchem's death, of course, completely alters the situation, and you can make what use you please of the incidents. In this decision I have been helped by my dear Fitz, who spent last Sunday with us on his way South to in-

TO MY READERS

investigate a financial matter of enormous magnitude and which only a giant intellect like his own can grasp. Fitz's only fear,—I quote his exact words, my dear Major,—is that “you will let Klutchem down easy instead of roasting him alive as he deserves,” but then you must not mind Fitz, for he always uses intemperate language when speaking of this gentleman.

Your room is always ready for you, and if you will run down to us now, we can smother you in roses. Chad is over his cold, but the old man seems feeble at times. Aunt Nancy is out in her coach paying some visits, and doesn't know I am writing or she would certainly send you her love.

I thanked you, did I not, for all your kindness about the double sets of harness? But I must tell you again how well the leaders look in them. The two sorrels are particularly splendid. Go into Wood's some day this week and write me what you think of a carriage he has just built for me,—a small affair

TO MY READERS

in which Aunt Nancy can drive to Warren-town, or I can send to the depot for a friend.

All my heart to you, my dear Major. An open hand and a warm welcome is always yours at Carter Hall.

Your ever obedient servant and honored friend,

GEORGE FAIRFAX CARTER.

With the Colonel's permission, then, I am privileged to usher you into his cosy dining-room in Bedford Place, there to enjoy the Virginian's rare hospitality.

F. HOPKINSON SMITH.

September 30, 1903.

ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>Katy dropped her head on his shoulder again</i>	Frontispiece
<i>"Take them upstairs and put them on my dressin' table"</i>	Facing page 18
<i>The Colonel smoothed out the letter</i>	42
<i>"Misser Klutchem and Misser Fitzpatrick"</i>	72
<i>"One of your body-guard, Aunt Nancy?"</i>	92
<i>The boy hung his head</i>	104
<i>"Please, I'm Katy Klutchem, and I've come for the Christmas tree"</i>	124
<i>Each guest had a candle alight</i>	154

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

I

“**W**HAT am I gwine to do wid dese yere barkers, Colonel?” asked Chad, picking up his master’s case of duelling pistols from the mantel. “I ain’t tetched der moufs since I iled ’em up for dat Klutchem man.”

“Take them upstairs, Chad, and put them away,” answered the Colonel with an indignant wave of the hand.

“No chance o’ pickin’ him, I s’pose? Done got away fo’ sho, ain’t he?”

The Colonel nodded his head and kept

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

on looking into the fire. The subject was evidently an unpleasant one.

"Couldn't Major Yancey an' de Jedge do nuffin?" persisted the old servant, lifting one of the pistols from the case and squinting into its polished barrel.

"Eve'ything that a gentleman could do was done, Chad. You are aware of that, Major?" and he turned his head towards me—the Colonel will insist on calling me "Major." "But I am not done with him yet, Chad. The next time I meet him I shall lay my cane over his back. Take them upstairs and put them on my dress-in' table. We'll keep them for some gentleman at home."

The Colonel arose from his chair, picked up the decanter, poured out a glass for me and one for himself, replenished his long clay pipe from a box of tobacco

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

within reach of his hand and resumed his seat again. Mention of Mr. Klutchem's name produced a form of restlessness in my host which took all his self-control to overcome.

"——And, Chad!" The old darky had now reached the door opening into the narrow hall, the case of pistols in his hand.

"Yes, sah."

"I think you have a right to know, Chad, why I did not meet Mr. Klutchem in the open field."

Chad bent his head in attention. This had really been the one thing of all others about which this invaluable servant had been most disturbed. Before this it had been a word, a blow, and an exchange of shots at daybreak in all the Colonel's affairs—all that Chad had attended—and yet a week or more had now elapsed since

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

this worthy darky had moulded some extra bullets for these same dogs "wid der moufs open," and until to-night the case had never even left its place on the mantel.

"I was disposed, Chad," the Colonel continued, "to overlook Mr. Klutchem's gross insult after a talk I had with Mr. Fitzpatrick, and I went all the way to the scoundrel's house to tell him so. I found him in his chair suffe'in' from an attack of gout. I had my caa'idge outside, and offe'd in the most co'teous way to conduct him to it and drive him to my office, where a number of his friends and mine were assembled in order that the apology I p'oposed might be as impressive as the challenge I sent. He refused, Chad, in the most insolent manner, and I left him with the remark that I should lay my

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

cane over his shoulders whenever I met him ; and I *shall*."

" Well, befo' Gawd, I knowed sumpin' had been gwine on pretty hot, for I never seed you so b'ilin' as when you come home, Colonel," replied the old servant, bowing low at the mark of his master's confidence. " I spec', though, I'd better put a couple o' corks in der moufs so we kin hab 'em ready if anythin' comes out o' dis yere caanin' business. I've seen 'em put away befo' in my time," he added in a louder voice, looking towards me as if to include me in his declaration ; " but they allus hab to come for 'em agin, when dey get to caanin' one another." And he patted the box meaningly and left the room.

The Colonel again turned to me.

" I have vehy few secrets from Chad,

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Major, and none of this kind. By the way, I suppose that yaller dog has gotten over his gout by this time."

"Don't call him names, Colonel. He will write his own for a million if he goes on. I was in Fitz's office this morning, and I hear that Klutchem and his Boston crowd have got about every share of Consolidated Smelting issued, and the boys are climbing for it. Fitz told me it went up fifteen points in an hour. By the by, Fitz is coming up to-night."

"I am not surprised, suh,—I am not surprised at anything these Yankees do. A man who could not appreciate a gentleman's feelin's placed as I was would never feel for a creditor, suh. He thinks of nothin' but money and what it buys him, and it buys him nothin' but vulgaarity, suh."

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

The Colonel was in the saddle now; I never interrupt him in one of these moods. He had risen from his chair and was standing on the mat before the fire in his favorite attitude, thumbs in his armholes, his threadbare, well-brushed coat thrown wide.

“They’ve about ruined our country, suh, these money-grubbers. I saw the workin’ of one of their damnable schemes only a year or so ago, in my own town of Caartersville. Some Nawthern men came down there, suh, and started a Bank. Their plan was to start haalf a dozen mo’ of them over the County, and so they called this one the Fust National. They never started a second, suh. Our people wouldn’t permit it, and befo’ I get through you’ll find out why. They began by hirin’ a buildin’ and movin’ in an

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

iron safe about as big as a hen-coop. Then they sent out a circular addressed to our prominent citizens which was a model of style, and couched in the most co'teous terms, but which, suh, was nothin' mo' than a trap. I got one and I can speak by the book. It began by sayin' that eve'y accommodation would be granted to its customers, and ended by offerin' money at the lowest rates of interest possible. This occurred, suh, at a time of great financial depression with us, following as it did the close of hostilities, and their offer was gladly accepted. It was the fust indication any of us had seen on the part of any Yankee to bridge over the bloody chasm, and we took them at their word. We put in what money we had, and several members of our oldest families, in order to give chaaracter to the enterprise, had

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

their personal notes discounted and used the money they got for them for various private purposes—signin' as a gaarantee of their good faith whatever papers the bank people requi'ed of them. Now, suh, what do you think happened—not to me, for I was not in need of financial assistance at the time, Aunt Nancy havin' come into possession of some funds of her own in Baltimo',—but to one of my personal friends, Colonel Powhatan Tabb, a near neighbor of mine and a gentleman of the highest standin'? Because, suh"—here the Colonel spoke with great deliberation—"his notes had not been paid on the vehy day and hour—a thing which would have greatly inconvenienced him—Colonel Tabb found a sheriff in charge of his home one mornin' and a red flag hangin' from his po'ch. Of co'se, suh, he de-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

manded an explanation of the outrage, and some words followed of a blasphemous nature which I shall not repeat. I shall never forget my feelin's, suh, as I stood by and witnessed that outrage. Old family plate that had been in the Tabb family for mo' than a century was knocked down to anybody who would buy; and befo' night, suh, my friend was stripped of about eve'ything he owned in the world. Nothin' escaped, suh, not even the po'-traits of his ancestors!"

"What became of the bank, Colonel?" I asked in as serious a tone as I could command.

"What became of it? What *could* become of it, Major? Our people were aroused, suh, and took the law into their own hands, and the last I saw of it, suh, the hen-coop of a safe was standin' in the

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

midst of a heap of smokin' ashes. I heard that the Bank people broke it open with a sledge-hammer when it cooled off, put the money they had stolen from our people in a black caarpet-bag, and escaped. Such pi'acies, suh, are not only cruel but vulgaar. Mr. Klutchem's rob'ries are quite in line with these men. He takes you by the throat in another way, but he strangles you all the same."

The Colonel stroked his goatee in a meditative way, reached over my chair, picked up his half-emptied wine-glass, sipped its contents absent-mindedly and said in an apologetic tone:

"Forgive me, Major, for mentionin' Mr. Klutchem's name, I have no right to speak of him in this way behind his back. I promise you, suh, that it will not occur again."

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

As the Colonel ceased I caught sight of Fitz's round, good-natured face, ruddy with the cold of the snowy December night, his shoe-button eyes sparkling behind his big-bowed spectacles peering around the edge of the open door. Chad had heard his well-known brisk tread as he mounted the steps and had let him in before he could knock.

"Who are you going to kill now?" we heard Fitz ask the old darky.

"Dey was iled up for dat Klutchem man, but he done slid, the Colonel says."

"Klutchem! Klutchem!—nothing but Klutchem. I don't seem to get rid of him down-town or up," Fitz blurted out as he entered the room.

The Colonel had bounded forward at the first sound of Fitz's voice, and had him now by both hands. In another minute

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

he had slipped off Fitz's wet overcoat and was forcing him into a chair beside my own, calling to Chad in the meanwhile to run for hot water as quick as his legs could carry him, as Mr. Fitzpatrick was frozen stiff and must have a hot toddy before he could draw another breath.

"Keep still, Fitz, don't move. I'll be back in a minute," the Colonel cried, and off he went to the sideboard for the ingredients—a decanter of whiskey, the sugar-bowl, and a nutmeg-grater, all of which he placed on the mantel over Fitz's head.

The toddy made with the help of Chad's hot water, the Colonel moved his chair so that as he talked he could get his hand on Fitz's knee and said :

"What were you doing out in the cold hall talkin' to Chad, anyhow, you dear boy,

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

with this fire burnin' and my hands itchin' for you? "

"Dodging Chad's guns. Got that same old arsenal with him, I see," Fitz answered, edging his chair nearer the fire and stretching out his hands to the blaze. "Pity you didn't fill Klutchem full of lead when you had the chance, Colonel. It would have saved some of us a lot of trouble. He's got the Street by the neck and is shaking the life out of it."

"How was it when you left, Fitz?" I asked in an undertone.

"Looked pretty ugly. I shouldn't wonder if the stock opened at 60 in the morning."

"Have you covered your shorts yet?" I continued in a whisper.

"Not yet." Here Fitz leaned over and said to me behind his hand: "Not

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

a word of all this now to the Colonel. Only worry him, and he can't do any good."

"By the by, Colonel"—here Fitz straightened up, and with a tone in his voice as if what he really wanted to talk about was now on the end of his tongue said: "is Aunt Nancy coming for Christmas? Chad thinks she is."

The Colonel, who had noticed the confidential aside, did not reply for a moment. Then he remarked, with a light trace of impatience in his voice:

"If you have unloaded all the caares of yo' office, Fitz, I will answer yo' question, but I cannot soil the dear lady's name by bringin' it into any conversation in which that man has a part. There are some subjects no gentleman should discuss; Mr. Klutchem's affairs is one of them. I have

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

already expressed my opinion of him both to the Major and to Chad and I have promised them both that that scoundrel's name shall never again pass my lips. Oblige me by never mentionin' it. Forgive me, Fitz. There's my hand. You know I love you too well for you to think that I say this in anythin' but kindness. Let me put a little mo' whiskey in that toddy, Fitz—it lacks color. So—that's better. Aunt Nancy did you ask about, my dear Fitz?—of co'se, she's comin'. And, Major,—did I tell you"—here the Colonel turned to me—"that she's goin' to bring a servant with her this time? The dear woman is gettin' too old to travel alone, and since Chad has been with me she has felt the need of some one to wait upon her. She has passed some weeks or mo' in Richmond, she writes, and has greatly

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

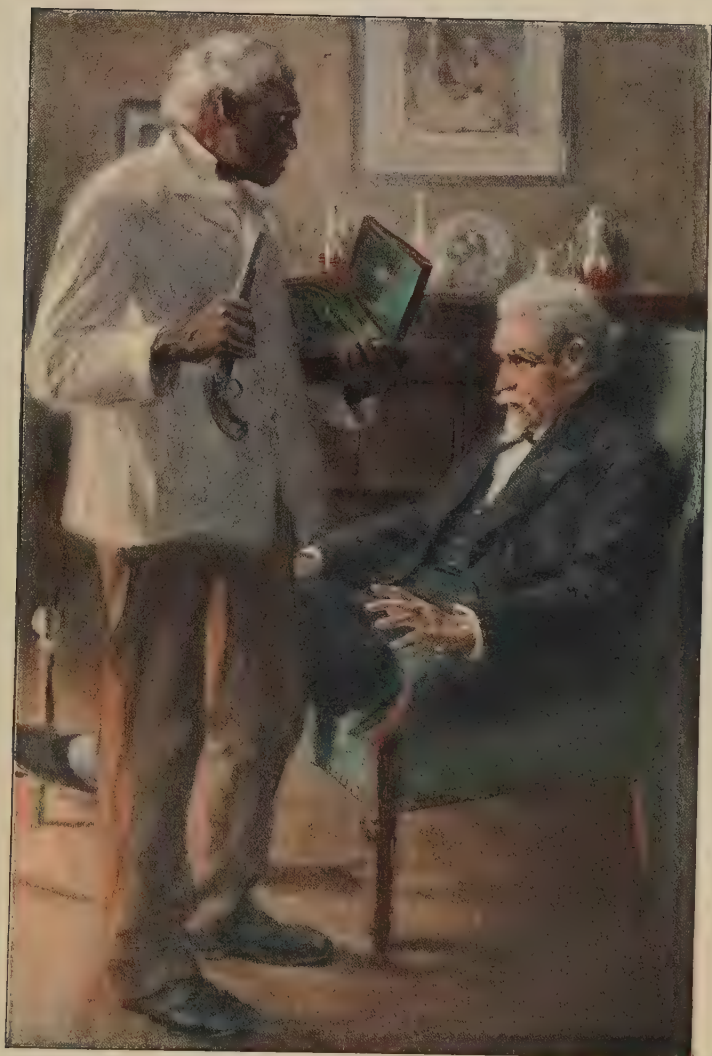
enjoyed the change. Make no engagement for Christmas, either one of you. That loveliest of women, suh, will grace our boa'd, and it is her special wish that both of you be present."

Fitz crushed the sugar in his glass, remarked that there was not the slightest doubt of *his* being present, winked at me appreciatingly over the edge of the tumbler, rubbed his paunch slowly with one hand, and with eyes upcast took another sip of the mixture.

The Virginian to Fitz was a never-ending well of pleasure. The Colonel's generosity, his almost Quixotic sense of honor, his loyalty to his friends, his tenderness over Chad and his reverence and love for that dear Aunt—who had furnished him really with all the ready money he had spent for years, and who was at the mo-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

ment caring for the old place at Cartersville while the Colonel was in New York endeavoring to float, through Fitz, the bonds of the Cartersville & Warrentown Railroad—excited not only Fitz's admiration and love, but afforded the broker the pleasantest of contrasts to the life he led in the Street, a contrast so delightful that Fitz seldom missed at least an evening's salutation with him. That not a shovel of earth had yet been dug on the line of the Colonel's Railroad, and that the whole enterprise was one of those schemes well-nigh impossible to finance, made no difference to Fitz. He never lost an opportunity to work off the securities whenever there was the slightest opening. The bonds, of course, had not been issued; they had never been printed, in fact. These details would come later,—when—



"Take them upstairs and put them on my dressin' table."

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

ever the capitalist or syndicate should begin to look into the enterprise in earnest.

Up to the moment when this whirl had caught the Street—an event which Klutchem acting for his friends had helped—Fitz had never quite given up the hope that somehow, or in some way, or by some hook or crook, some deluded capitalist, with more money than brains, would lose both by purchasing these same “Garden Spots” as the securities of the Colonel’s proposed road were familiarly called in the Street. That but one single inquiry had thus far ever been made, and that no one of his or anybody else’s customers had ever given them more than a hasty dismissal, had never discouraged Fitz.

As for the Colonel he was even more sanguine. The dawn of success was already breaking through the darkness and

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

his hopes would soon be realized. Hour after hour he would sit by his fire, building fairy castles in its cheery coals. Almost every night there was a new picture. In each the big bridge over the Tench was already built, bearing his double track road to Warrentown and the sea—he could see every span and pier of it; the town of Fairfax, named after his ancestors, was crowning the plateau; the round-house for his locomotives was almost complete, the wharves and landing docks finished. And in all of these pictures, warm and glowing, there was one which his soul coveted above all others—the return of the proud days of the old Estate: the barns and outbuildings repaired; the fences in order; Carter Hall restored to its former grandeur, and dear Aunt Nancy once more in her high spring coach, with

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Chad standing by to take her shawl and wraps. These things, and many others as rose colored and inspiring, the Colonel saw night after night in the glow and flash and sparkle of his wood fire.

No wonder then that Fitz kept hoping against hope ; deluding him with promises and keeping up his spirits with any fairy tale his conscience would permit his telling or his ingenuity contrive.

To-night, however, Fitz's nerve seemed to have failed him. To the Colonel's direct inquiry regarding the slight nibble of an English syndicate—(that syndicate which some months later made the Colonel's fortune and with which Fitz had buoyed up his hopes) the broker had only an evasive answer. The Colonel noticed the altered tone and thought he had divined the cause.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

“ You are tired out, Fitz. Isn't it so? I don't wonder when I think of the vast commercial problems you are solvin' every day. Go upstairs, my dear boy, and get into my bed for the night. I won't have you go home. It's too cold for you to go out and the snow is driftin' badly. I'll take the sofa here.”

“ No, Colonel, I think I'll toddle along home. I am tired, I guess. I ought to be; I've had nothing but hard knocks all day.”

“ Then you shan't leave my house, suh; I won't permit it. Chad, go upstairs and get Mr. Fitzpatrick's chamber ready for the night, and Chad——”

Fitz laughed. “ And have you sleep on that haircloth sofa, Colonel?” and he pointed to the sagging lounge.

“ Why not?—I've done it befo'. Come, I insist.”

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Fitz was on his feet now and with Chad's assistance was struggling into his overcoat, which that attentive darky had hung over a chairback that it might dry the easier.

"I'm going home, Colonel, and to bed," Fitz said in a positive tone. "I shouldn't sleep a wink if I knew you were thrashing around on that shake-down, and you wouldn't either. Good night;" and holding out his hand to his host, he gave me a tap on my shoulder as he passed my chair and left the room, followed by the Colonel.

It was only when the Colonel had found Fitz's rubbers himself and had turned up the collar of his coat and had made it snug around his throat to keep out the snow, and had patted him three times on the shoulder—he only showed

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

that sort of affection to Fitz—and had held the door open until both Fitz and Chad were lost in the gloom of the tunnel, the wind having extinguished the lantern, that the Colonel again resumed his seat by the fire.

“I must say I’m worried about Fitz, Major. He don’t look right and he don’t act right”—he sighed as he picked up his pipe and sank into his arm-chair until his head rested on its back. “I’m going to have him see a doctor. That’s what I’m going to do, and at once. Do you know of a good doctor, Major?”

“Medicine won’t help him, Colonel,” I answered. I knew the dear old fellow would not sleep a wink even in his own bed if the idea got into his head that Fitz was ill.

“What will?”

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

“ Money.”

The Colonel looked at me in astonishment.

“ What kind of money ? ”

“ Any kind that's worth a hundred cents on the dollar.”

“ Why, what nonsense, Major, I'd take Fitz's check for a million.”

“ Klutchem won't.”

“ What's the scoundrel got to do with it ? ”

“ Everything, unfortunately. Fitz is short of 10,000 shares of Consolidated Smelting, and Klutchem and his crowd have got about every share of it locked up in their safes. Some of Fitz's customers have gone back on him, and he's got to make the fight alone. If smelting goes up another fifteen points to-morrow Fitz goes with it. It's not a doctor

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

he wants, it's a banker. Cash, not pills, is what will pull Fitz through."

Had a bomb been exploded on the hearth at his feet the Colonel could not have been more astonished. He sat staring into my eyes as I unfolded the story, his face changing with every disclosure; horror at the situation, anger at the man who had caused it, and finally—and this dominated all the others—profound sympathy for the friend he loved. He knew something of the tightening of the grasp of a man like Klutchem and he did not underestimate the gravity of the situation. What Consolidated Smelting represented, or what place it held in the market were unknown quantities to the Colonel. What he really saw was the red flag of the auctioneer floating over the front porch of that friend in Virginia whom the Bank had

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

ruined, and the family silver and old portraits lying in the carts that were to take them away forever. It was part of the damnable system of Northern finance and now Fitzpatrick was to suffer a similar injustice.

“Fitz in Klutchem’s power! My God, suh!” he burst out at last, “you don’t tell me so! And Fitz never told me a word about it. My po’ Fitz! My po’ Fitz!” he added slowly with quivering lips. “Are you quite sure, Major, that the situation is as serious as you state it?”

“Quite sure. He told me so himself. He wanted me to keep still about it, but I didn’t want you to think he was ill.”

“You did right, Major. I should never have forgiven you if you had robbed me of the opportunity of helpin’

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

him. It's horrible; it's damnable. Such men as Klutchem, suh, ought to be drawn and quartered."

For an instant the Colonel leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, and looked steadily into the fire; then he said slowly with a voice full of sympathy, and in a tone as if he had at last made up his mind:

"No, I won't disturb the dear fellow to-night. He needs all the sleep he can get."

The Colonel was still in his chair gazing into the fire when I left. His pipe was out; his glass untasted; his chin buried in his collar.

"My po' Fitz!" was all he said as he lifted his hand and pressed my own. "Good night, Major."

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

When I had reached the hall door he roused himself, called me back and said slowly and with the deepest emotion :

“ Major, I shall help Fitz through this in the mornin’ if it takes eve’y dollar I’ve got in the world. Stop for me as you go down town and we will call at his office together.”

II

FITZ had not yet arrived when the Colonel in his eagerness stepped in front of me, and peered through the hole in the glass partition which divided Fitz's inner and outer offices.

"Come inside, Colonel, and wait—expect him after a while," was the reply from one of the clerks,—the first arrival.

But the Colonel was too restless to sit down, and too absorbed even to thank the young man for his courtesy or to accept his invitation. He continued pacing up and down the outer office, stopping now and then to note the heap of white ribbons tangled up in a wicker basket—records of the disasters and triumphs of the day be-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

fore,—or to gaze silently at the large map that hung over the steam-heater, or to study in an aimless way the stock lists skewered to the wall.

He had risen earlier than usual and had dressed himself with the greatest care and with every detail perfect. His shoes with their patches, one on each toe, were polished to more than Chad's customary brilliancy; his grey hair was brushed straight back from his forehead, its ends overlapping the high collar behind; his goatee was twisted to a fish-hook point and curled outward from his shirt-front; his moustache was smooth and carefully trimmed.

The coat,—it was the same old double-breasted coat, of many repairs—was buttoned tight over his chest giving his slender figure that military air which always

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

distinguished the Virginian when some matter of importance, some matter involving personal defence or offence, had to be settled. In one hand he carried his heavy cane with its silver top, the other held his well-brushed hat.

"What has kept Fitz?" he asked with some anxiety.

"Nothing, Colonel. Board doesn't open till ten o'clock. He'll be along presently," I answered.

Half an hour passed and still no Fitz. By this time I, too, had begun to feel nervous. This was a day of all others for a man in Fitz's position to be on hand early.

I interviewed the clerk privately.

"Stopped at the Bank," he said in an undertone. "He took some cats and dogs up with him last night and is trying

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

to get a loan. Going to rain down here to-day, I guess, and somebody'll get wet. Curb market is steady, but you can't tell anything till the Board opens."

At ten minutes before ten by the clock on the wall Fitz burst into the office, pulled a package from inside his coat, thrust it through the hole in the glass partition, whispered something to a second clerk who had just come in, and who at Fitz's command grabbed up his hat, and with three plunges was through the doorway and racing down the street. Then Fitz turned and saw us.

"Why, you dear Colonel, where the devil did you come from?"

The Colonel did not answer. He had noticed Fitz's concentrated, business-like manner, so different from his bearing of the night before, and had caught the anx-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

ious expression on the clerk's face as he bounded past him on his way to the street. It was evident that the situation was grave and the crisis imminent. The Colonel rose from his seat and held out his hand, his manner one of the utmost solemnity.

"I have heard all about it, Fitz. I am here to stand by you. Let us go inside where we can discuss the situation quietly."

Fitz looked at the clock—it was a busy day for him—shook the Colonel's hand in an equally impressive manner, glanced inquiringly at me over his shoulder, and we all three entered the private office and shut the door: he would give us ten minutes at all events. What really perplexed Fitz at the moment was the hour of the Colonel's visit and his reference to the "stand-by." These were mysteries which the broker failed to penetrate.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

The Colonel tilted his silver-topped cane against Fitz's desk, put his hat on a pile of papers, drew his chair close and laid his hand impressively on Fitz's arm. He had the air of a learned counsellor consulting with a client.

"You are too busy, Fitz, to go into the details, and my mind is too much occupied to listen to them, but just give me an outline of the situation so that I can act with the main facts befo' me."

Fitz looked at me inquiringly; received my helpless shrug as throwing but little light on the matter, and as was his invincible custom, fell instantly into the Colonel's mood, answering him precisely as he would have done a brother broker in a similar case.

"It is what we call a 'squeeze,' Colonel. I'm through for the day, I hope, for my

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

bank has come to my rescue. My clerk has just carried up a lot of stuff I managed to borrow. But you can't tell what tomorrow will bring. Looks to me as if everything was going to Bally-hack, and yet there are some things in the air that may change it over night."

"Am I right when I say that Mr. Klutchem is leadin' the attack? And on you?"

"That's just what he is doing—all he knows how."

"And that any relief must be with his consent?"

"Absolutely, for, strange to say, some of my defaulting customers have been operating in his office."

The Colonel mused for some time, twisting the fish-hook end of his goatee till it looked like a weapon of offence.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

"Is he in town?"

"He was yesterday afternoon."

The Colonel rose from his chair with a determined air and pulled his coat sleeves over his cuffs.

"I'll call upon him at once."

Fitz's expression changed. Once start the dear Colonel on a mission of this kind and there was no telling what complications might ensue.

"He won't see you."

"I have thought of that, Fitz. I do not forget that I informed him I would lay my cane over his back the next time we met, but that mattuh can wait. This concerns the welfare of my dea'est friend and takes precedence of all personal feelin's."

"But, Colonel, he would only show you the door. He don't want *talk*. He wants something solid as a margin. I've sent it

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

to him right along for their account, and he'll get what's coming to him to-day, but *talk* won't do any good."

"What do you mean by somethin' solid, Fitz?"

"Gilt-edged collateral,—5.20's or something as good."

"I presume any absolutely safe security would answer?"

"Yes."

"And of what amount?"

"Oh, perhaps fifty thousand,—perhaps a hundred. I'll know to-morrow."

The Colonel communed with himself for a moment, made a computation with his lips assisted by his fingers, and said with great dignity:

"You haven't had my 'Garden Spots' bonds printed yet, have you?"

"No."

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

"Nothin' lookin' to'ards it?"

"Yes, certainly, but nothing definite. I've got the proposition I told you about from the Engraving Company. Here it is." And Fitz pulled out a package of papers from a pigeon-hole and laid the letter before the Colonel. It was the ordinary offer agreeing to print the bonds for a specified sum, and had been one of the many harmless dodges Fitz had used to keep the Colonel's spirits up.

The Colonel studied the document carefully.

"When I accept this, of co'se, the mat-tuh is closed between me and the Company?"

"Certainly."

"And no other party could either print or receive the bonds except on my written order?"

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

"No." Fitz was groping now in the dark. Why the Colonel should have suddenly dropped Consolidated Smelting to speak of the "Garden Spots" was another mystery.

"And I have a right to transfer this order to any one I please?"

"Of course, Colonel." The mystery was now impenetrable.

"You have no objection to my takin' this letter, Fitz?"

"Not the slightest."

The Colonel walked to the window, looked out for a moment into the street, walked back to Fitz's desk, and with a tinge of resignation in his voice as if he had at last nerved himself for the worst, laid his hand on Fitz's shoulder:

"I should never have a moment's peace, Fitz, if I did not exhaust every means in

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

my power to ward off this catastrophe from you. Kindly give me a pen."

I moved closer. Was the Colonel going to sign his check for a million, or was there some unknown friend who, at a stroke of his pen, would come to Fitz's rescue?

The Colonel smoothed out the letter containing the proposition of the Engraving Company, tried the pen on his thumb-nail, dipped it carefully in the inkstand, poised it for an instant, and in a firm round hand wrote across its type-written face the words :

"Accepted.

GEORGE FAIRFAX CARTER,
of Cartersville."

Then he folded the paper carefully and slipped it into his inside pocket.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

This done, he shook Fitz's hand gravely, nodded to me with the air of a man absorbed in some weighty matter, picked up his cane and hat and left the office.

"What in the name of common sense is he going to do with that, Fitz?" I asked.

"I give it up," said Fitz. "Ask me an easy one. Dear old soul, isn't he lovely? He's as much worried over the market as if every dollar at stake was his own. Now you've got to excuse me, Major. I've got a land-office business on hand to-day."

The Colonel's manner as he left the room had been so calm and measured, his back so straight, the swing of his cane so rhythmical, his firm military tread so full of courage and determination, that I had



The Colonel smoothed out the letter.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

not followed him. When he is in these moods it is best to let him have his own way. Fitz and I had discovered this some days before, when we tried to dissuade him from planting into Klutchem's rotundity the bullets which Chad had cast with so much care.

Had I questioned him as he walked out this morning he would doubtless have said, "I do not expect you Nawthern men, with yo'r contracted ideas of what constitutes a man's personal honor, to understand the view I take of this mat-tuh, Major, but my blood requires it. I never forget that I am a Caarter, suh,—and you must never forget it either."

Moreover, had I gone with him the visit might have assumed an air of undue importance. There was nothing therefore for me to do but to wait. So I buried my-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

self in an armchair, picked up the morning papers, and tried to possess my soul in patience until the Colonel should again make his appearance with a full report of his mission.

Twice during my long wait Fitz burst in, grabbed up some papers from his desk and bounded out again, firing some orders to his clerks as he disappeared through the door. He was too absorbed to more than nod to me, and he never once mentioned the Colonel's name.

About noon a customer in the outer office—there were half a dozen of them watching the ticker—handed an "extra" to the clerk, who brought it to me. Consolidated Smelting was up ten points; somebody had got out an injunction, and two small concerns in Broad Street had struck their colors and sent word to the

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Exchange that they could not meet their contracts.

Still no Colonel !

Had he failed to find Klutchem ; had he been thrown out of the office or had he refrained from again visiting Fitz until he had accomplished something definite for his relief?

With the passing of the hours I became uneasy. The Colonel, I felt sure, especially in his present frame of mind, would not desert Fitz unless something out of the common had happened. I would go to Klutchem's office first, and not finding him there, I would keep on to Bedford Place and interview Chad.

" Been here ? " growled Klutchem's clerk in answer to my question. " Well, I should think so. Tried to murder Mr. Klutchem. They're all up at the police

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

station. Nice day for a muss like this when everything's kitin'! You don't know whether you're a-foot or a-horse-back! These fire-eaters ought to be locked up!"

"Arrested!"

"Well you'd a-thought so if you'd been here half an hour ago. He kept comin' in callin' for Mr. Klutchem, and then he sat down and said he'd wait. Looked like a nice, quiet old fellow, and nobody took any notice of him. When Mr. Klutchem came in—he'd been to the Clearing-house—they both went into his private office and shut the door. First thing we heard was some loud talk and then the thump of a cane, and when I got inside the old fellow was beatin' Mr. Klutchem over the head with a stick thick as your wrist. We tried to put him out,

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

or keep him quiet, but he wanted to fight the whole office. Then a cop heard the row and came in and took the bunch to the station. Do you know him?"

This last inquiry coming at the end of the explosion showed me how vivid the scene still was in the clerk's mind and how it had obliterated every other thought.

"Know him! I should think I did," I answered, my mind in a whirl. "Where have they taken him?"

"Where have they taken 'em, Billy?" asked the clerk, repeating my question to an assistant.

"Old Slip. You can't miss it. It's got a lamp over the door."

The Sergeant smiled when I stepped up to the desk and made the inquiry.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Yes; a man named Klutchem had made a charge of assault against one George Carter. Carter was then locked up in one of the cells and could not be interviewed without the consent of the Captain of the Precinct who would be back in a few minutes.

“Guess it ain’t serious,” the Sergeant added. “Couple of old sports got hot, that’s all, and this old feller—” and he hunched his shoulder towards the cells—“pasted the other one over the nut with his toothpick. Step one side. Next!”

I sat down on a bench. The dear Colonel locked up in a cell like a common criminal. What would Chad say; what would Aunt Nancy say; what would Fitz say; what would everybody say? And then the mortification to him; the wounding of his pride; the disgrace of it all.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Men and women came and went ; some with bruised heads, some with blackened eyes, one wearing a pair of handcuffs—a sneak thief, caught, with two overcoats. Was the Colonel sharing a cell with such people as these? The thought gave me a shiver.

A straightening-up of half a dozen policemen ; a simultaneous touching of caps, and the Captain, a red-faced, black-moustached, blue-coated chunk of a man, held together at the waist by a leather belt and be-decked and be-striped with gilt buttons and gold braid, climbed into the pulpit of justice and faced the room.

I stepped up.

He listened to my story, nodded his head to a doorman and I followed along the iron corridor and stood in front of a row of cells. The Turnkey looked over a

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

hoop of keys, turned one in a door, threw it wide and said, waving his finger :

“ Inside ! ” These men use few words.

The Colonel from the gloom of the cell saw me first.

“ Why, you dear Major ! ” he cried. You are certainly a good Sama’itan. In prison and you visited me. I am sorry that I can’t offer you a chair, suh, but you see that my quarters are limited. Fortunately so far I have been able to occupy it alone. Tell me of Fitz——”

“ But Colonel ! ” I gasped. “ I want to know how this happened ? How was it possible that you——”

“ My dear Major, that can wait. Tell me of *Fitz*. He has not been out of my thoughts a moment. Will he get through the day ? I did eve’ything I could, suh, and exhausted eve’y means in my power.”

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

"Fitz is all right. They've got out an injunction and the market is steadier——"

"And he will weather the gale?"

"I think so."

"Thank God for that, suh!" he answered, his lips quivering. "When you see him give him my dea'est love and tell him that I left no stone unturned."

"Why you'll see him in an hour yourself. You don't suppose we are going to let you stay here, do you?"

"I don't know, suh. I am not p'e-pared to say. I have violated the laws of the State, suh, and I did it purposely, and I'm willin' to abide the consequences and take my punishment. I should have struck Mr. Klutchem after what he said to me if I had been hanged for it in an hour. I may be released, suh, but it will not be with any taint on my honor. And

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

now that my mind is at rest about Fitz, I will tell you exactly what occurred and you can judge for yo'self.

“ When Mr. Klutchem at last arrived at his office—I had gone there several times—I said to him :

“ ‘ Don't start, Mr. Klutchem, I have come in the interest of my friend, Mr. Fitzpatrick. Any diff'ences between you and me can wait for a mo' convenient season.’

“ ‘ Come in,’ he said, and he looked somewhat relieved, ‘ what do you want ? ’ and we entered his private office and sat down. I then, in the most co'teous manner, went into the details of the transaction, and asked him in the name of decency that he would not crowd Fitz to the wall and ruin him, but that he would at least give him time to make good his obligations.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

“‘He can have it,’ he blurted out, ‘have all the time he wants—all of ’em can have it.’ You know how coarse he can be, Major, and can understand how he said this. ‘But’—and here Mr. Klutchem laid his finger alongside his nose—a vulgar gesture, of co’sse, but quite in keepin’ with the man—‘we want some collateral that are copper-fastened and gilt-edged all the way through’—I quote his exact words, Major.

“‘I have expected that, suh,’ I said, ‘and I came p’epared,’ and I unbuttoned my coat, took out the document you saw me sign in Fitz’s office, and laid it befo’ him.

“‘What is this?’ he said.

“‘My entire interest in the Caartersville and Warrenton Air Line Railroad,’ I answered. ‘The whole issue of the Gaar-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

den Spots, as you have no doubt heard them familiarly and very justly called, suh.'

"He looked at me and said :

" ' Why these are not bonds—it is only an offer to print 'em,' he said.

" ' I am aware of that,' I answered, ' but look at my signature, suh. I shall on your acceptance of my proposition, transfer the whole issue to you—then they become yo' absolute property.'

" ' For what?' he interrupted.

" ' As an offerin' for my friend, suh.'

" ' What! As margin for Consolidated Smeltin'?'

" ' True, suh. They are, of co'se, largely in excess of yo' needs, but Mr. Fitzpatrick is one of my dea'est friends. You, of co'se, realize that I am left penniless myself if my friend's final obligation to you should exceed their face value.'

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

“ He got up, opened the door of a safe and said, ‘ Do you see that tin box ? ’

“ ‘ I do, suh.’

“ ‘ Do you know what is in it ? ’

“ ‘ I do not, suh.’

“ ‘ Full of stuff that will sell under the hammer above par. Tell Mr. Fitzpatrick if he and his customers have anythin’ like that to bring it in—and look here ’—and he pulled out a small drawer. ‘ See that watch ? ’ I looked in and saw a gold watch, evidently a gentleman’s, Major. ‘ That watch belonged to a customer who got short of our stock last week. It’s wiped out now and a lot of other things he brought in. That’s what we call *collateral* down here.’

“ ‘ I am not surprised, suh,’ I answered. ‘ If men of yo’ class can fo’ce themselves into our county; divest a man of his

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

silver-plate and family po'traits, as was done to a gentleman friend of mine of the highest standin' in my own State by a Nawthern caarpet-bag Bank, I am not astonished that you avail yo'self of a customer's watch.' I said '*divest*' and '*avail*,' Major. I intended to say '*steal*' and '*rob*,' but I checked myself in time.

" 'Do you think that's any worse than yo' comin' down here and tryin' to bunco me with a swindle like that'—and he picked up the document and tossed it on the flo'.

" You know me well enough, Major, to know what followed. Befo' the words were out of his mouth he was flat on his back and I standin' over him with my cane. Then his clerks rushed in and separated us. My present situation is the result."

The Colonel stopped and looked about

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

the prison corridor. "Strange and interestin' place, isn't it, Major? I shall be reasonably comfo'table here, I s'pose"—and he raised his eyes towards the white-washed ceiling. "There is not quite so much room as I had at City Point when I was a prisoner of war, but I shall get along, no doubt. I have not inquired yet whether they will allow me a servant, but if they do I shall have Chad bring me down some comfo'ts in the mornin'. I think I should like a blanket and pillow and perhaps an easy-chair. I can tell better after passin' the night here. By the way, Major, on yo' way home you might stop and see Chad. Tell him the facts exactly as I have stated them to you. He will understand; he was with me, you remember, when I was overpow'ed and captured the last year of the War."

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

The Turnkey, who had been pacing up and down the corridor, stopped in front of the gate. The Colonel read the expression on his face, and shaking my hand warmly, said with the same air that a captured general might have had in taking leave of a member of his staff:

“The officer seems impatient, Major, and I must, therefo’, ask you to excuse me. My dear love to Fitz, and tell him not to give my imprisonment a thought. Good-bye,” and he waved his hand majestically and stepped back into the cell.

III

THE arrival of Fitz in a cab at the Police-station half an hour later—just time enough for me to run all the way to his office—the bailing out of the Colonel much against his protest, his consent being gained only when Fitz and I assured him that such things were quite within the limit of our judicial code, and that no stain on his honor would or could ensue from any such relief; the Colonel's formal leave-taking of the Captain, the Sergeant and the Turnkey, each of whom he thanked impressively for the courtesies they had shown him; our driving—the Colonel and I—post-haste to Bedford Place, lest by any means Chad might have

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

heard of the affair and so be frightened half out of his wits ; the calm indifference of that loyal darky when he ushered us into the hall and heard the Colonel's statement, and Chad's sententious comment : " In de Calaboose, Colonel ! Well, fo' God ! what I tell ye 'bout dis caanin' bis'ness. Got to git dem barkers ready jes' I tol' ye ; dat's de only thing dat'll settle dis muss,"—these and other incidents of the day equally interesting form connecting links in a story which has not only become part of the history of the Carter family but which still serve as delightful topics whenever the Colonel's name is mentioned by his many friends in the Street.

More important things, however, than the arrest and bailing out of the Colonel were taking place in the Street. One of those financial bombs which are always

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

lying around loose—a Pacific Mail, or Erie, or N. P.—awaiting some fool-match to start it, sailed out from its hiding place a few minutes before the Exchange closed—while Fitz was bailing out the Colonel, in fact—hung for an instant trembling in mid-air, and burst into prominence with a sound that shook the Street to its foundations. In five minutes the floor of the Exchange was a howling mob, the brokers fighting, tearing, yelling themselves hoarse. Money went up to one per cent. and legal interest over night, and stocks that had withstood every financial assault for years tottered, swayed and plunged headlong. Into the abyss fell Consolidated Smelting. Not only were the ten points of the day's rise wiped out, but thirty points besides. Shares that at the opening sold readily at 55 went beg-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

ging at 30. Klutchem and his backers were clinging to the edges of the pit with ruin staring them in the face, and Fitz was sailing over the crater thousands of dollars ahead of his obligations.

THE following morning another visitor—a well-dressed man with a diamond pin in his scarf—walked up and down Fitz's office awaiting his arrival—a short, thick-set, large-paunched man with a heavy jaw, a straight line of a mouth, two little restless eyes wobbling about in a pulp of wrinkles, flabby cheeks, a nose that was too small for the area it failed to ornament, and a gray stubbly beard shaven so closely at its edges that it looked as if its owner might either wear it on his chin or put it in his pocket at his pleasure.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

"Down yet?" asked the visitor in a quick, impatient voice.

"Not yet, Mr. Klutchem. Take a seat." Then the clerk passed his hand over his face to straighten out a rebellious smile and hid his head in the ledger.

"I'll wait," retorted the banker, and stepping inside Fitz's private office he settled himself in a chair, legs apart, hands clasped across his girth.

Fitz entered with an air that would have carried comfort to the Colonel's soul—with a spring, a breeze, a lightness; a being at peace with all the world; and best of all with a self-satisfied repose that was in absolute contrast to the nervousness of the day before.

"Who?" he asked of his clerk.

"Klutchem."

"Where?"

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

The clerk pointed to the office door.

Fitz's face straightened out and grew suddenly grave, but he stepped briskly into his sanctum and faced his enemy.

"Well, what is it, Mr. Klutchem?"

Before his visitor opened his mouth, Fitz saw that the fight was all out of the Head Centre of Consolidated Smelting. A nervous, conciliatory smile started from the line of Klutchem's mouth, wrinkled the flesh of his face as far as his cheeks, and died out again.

"We got hit pretty bad yesterday, Fitzpatrick, and I thought we might as well talk it over and see if we couldn't straighten out the market."

"Then it isn't about Colonel Carter?" said Fitz coldly.

He had all the Consolidated he wanted and didn't see where Klutchem could be

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

of the slightest use in straightening out anything.

"I'll attend to him later," replied Klutchem, and a curious expression overspread his face. "You heard about it, then?"

"Heard about it! I bailed him out. If you wanted to lock anybody up why didn't you get after someone who knew the ropes, not a man like the Colonel who never had a dishonest thought in his head and who is as tender-hearted as a child."

"You don't know what you're talking about," flared Klutchem. "He came down with a cock-and-bull story and wanted me to take——"

"I know the whole story, every word of it. He came down to offer you every dollar of his interest in a scheme that is as real to him as if the bonds were selling on the Exchange at par. They are all he

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

has in the world, and if some miracle should occur and they should be worth their face value he would never touch a penny of the proceeds if he was starving to death, because of the promise he made you. And in my interest, too, not his own, and all for love of me, his friend."

"But it was only a letter from a concern offering to print——"

"Certainly. And across it he had written his name—both, I grant you, not worth the paper they were written on. But why didn't you have the decency to humor the dear old fellow as we all do, and treat him with the same courtesy with which he treated you, instead of insulting him by throwing the letter in his face. You'll excuse me, Mr. Klutchem, when I say it gets me pretty hot when I think of it. I don't blame him for cracking you over the head,

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

and neither would you, if you understood him as I do."

Klutchem looked out of the window and twisted his thumbs for an instant as if in deep thought. The outcome of the interview was of the utmost importance to him, and he did not want anything to occur which would prejudice his case with the broker. Fitz sat in front of him, bent forward, his hands on his knees, his eyes boring into Klutchem's.

Then a puzzled, and strange to say what appeared to be a more kindly expression broke over Klutchem's face.

"I guess I was rough, but I didn't mean it, really. You know how it was yesterday—regular circus all day. I wouldn't have made the charge at the police-station—for he didn't hurt me much—if the policeman hadn't compelled me. And then

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

don't forget, this isn't the first time I've come across him. He came to my house once when I was laid up with the gout, and——"

"Yes," interrupted Fitz, "I haven't forgotten it, and what did he come for? To apologize, didn't he? I should have thought you'd have seen enough of him at that time to know what kind of a man he was. Down here in the Street we've got to put things down on paper and we don't trust anybody. We don't understand the kind of a man whose word is literally as good as his bond, and who, to help any man he calls his friend, would spend his last cent and go hungry the balance of his life. I've lived round here a good deal in my time and I've seen all kinds of men, but the greatest compliment I ever had paid me in my life was when the

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Colonel offered you yesterday the scrap of paper that you threw back in his face."

As Fitz talked on Klutchem's tightly knit brows began to loosen. He hadn't heard such things for a good many years. Life was a scramble and devil take the hindermost with him. If anybody but Fitz—one of the level-headed men in the Street—had talked to him thus, he might not have paid attention, but he knew Fitz was sincere and that he spoke from his heart. The still water at the bottom of the banker's well—the water that was frozen over or sealed up, or so deep that few buckets ever reached it—began to be stirred. His anxiety over Consolidated only added another length to the bucket's chain.

"Fitzpatrick, I guess you're right. What ought I to do?"

"You ought to go up to his house this

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

very day and beg his pardon, and then wipe out that idiotic charge you made at the police-station."

"I will, Fitzpatrick."

"You will?"

"Yes."

"There's my hand. Now bring out your Consolidated Smelting, and I'll do what's decent."

At four o'clock that same day Fitz, with Mr. Klutchem beside him, swung back the wicket-gate of the tunnel, traversed its gloom, crossed the shabby yard piled high with snow heaped up by Chad's active shovel, and rapped at the front door of the little house.

The Colonel was in his chair by the fire. I had just told him the good news, and he and I were sampling a fresh bottle of the groceryman's Madeira in celebration of

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

the joyous turn in Fitz's affairs, when Chad with eyes staring from his head announced :

"Misser Klutchem and Misser Fitzpatrick."

What the old darky thought was coming I do not know, but I learned afterwards, that as soon as he had closed the door behind the visitors, he mounted the stairs three steps at a time, grabbed up the case of pistols from his master's dressing-table, pulled the corks from their mouths, and hurrying down laid the case and its contents on the hall table to be ready for instant use.

The announcement of Klutchem's name brought the Colonel to his feet as straight as a ramrod.

"It's all right, Colonel," said Fitz, noting the color rise in his friend's face. "Mr.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Klutchem and I have settled all our differences. He has just offered me a barrel of Consolidated, and at my own price. That fight's all over, and I bear him no grudge. As to yourself, he has come up to tell you how sorry he is for what occurred yesterday, and to make any reparation to you in his power."

Klutchem had not intended to go so far as that, and he winced a little under Fitz's allusion to the "barrel," but he was in for it now, and would follow Fitz's lead to the end. Then again, the papers in the Consolidated matter would not be signed until the morning.

"Yes, Carter, I'm sorry. Fact is, I misunderstood you. I was very busy, you remember, and I'm sorry, too, for what occurred at the police-station; that, however, you know I couldn't help."



"Misser Klutchem and Misser Fitzpatrick."

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

The omission of the Virginian's title scraped the skin from the Colonel's *amour propre*, but the words "I'm sorry" coming immediately thereafter healed the wound.

The military bearing of our host began to relax.

"And you have come here with my friend Mr. Fitzpatrick to tell me this?"

"I have."

"And you intended no reflection on my honor when you—when you—handed me back my secu'ities?"

"No, I didn't. The stuff wasn't our kind, you know. If I had stopped to hear what you had to say I'd——"

"Let it all pass, suh. I accept yo' apology in the spirit in which it was given, suh. As to my imprisonment, that is a matter which is not of the slightest conse-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

quence. We soldiers are accustomed to these inconveniences, suh. It is part of the fortunes of war. Take that chair, Mr. Klutchem, and let my servant relieve you of yo' coat and hat."

The promptness with which that individual answered to his name left no doubt in my mind that that worthy defender of the Colonel's honor had been standing ready outside the door, which had been left partly open for the purpose, his hand on the knob.

"Yes, sah. I heard ye, Colonel."

"And, Chad, bring some glasses for the gentlemen."

Klutchem settled his large frame in the chair that had been vacated by the Colonel, and watched the glass being slowly filled from a decanter held in his host's own hands. Fitz and I retired to the vicinity of the side-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

board, where he gave me in an undertone an account of the events of the morning.

"Got a nice box of a place here, Colonel," remarked Mr. Klutchem. He remembered the title this time—the surroundings had begun to tell upon him. "Cost you much?" and the broker's eyes roamed about the room, taking in the big mantel, the brass andirons, India blue china and silver candlesticks.

"A mere trifle, suh," said the Colonel, stiffening. The cost of things were never mentioned in this atmosphere. "To associate bargain and sale with the appointments of yo' household is like puttin' yo' hospitality up at auction," he would frequently say.

"A mere trifle, suh," he repeated. "My estates, as you probably know, are in Virginia, near my ancestral town of Caarters-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

ville. Are you familiar with that part of the country, suh?"

And thereupon, on the banker's expressing his entire ignorance of Fairfax County and its contiguous surroundings, the Colonel, now that his honor as a duellist had been satisfied by Klutchem's apologies; his friend's ruin averted by the banker's generosity, as was attested by his offering Fitz a barrel full of securities which the day previous were worth their weight in gold; and especially because this same philanthropist was his guest, at once launched forth on the beauty of his section of the State. In glowing terms he described the charms of the river Tench; the meadows knee deep in clover; the mountains filled with the riches of the Orient looming up into the blue; the forests of hardwood, etc., etc., and all in so persuasive

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

and captivating a way that the practical banker, always on the lookout for competent assistants, made a mental memorandum to consult Fitz in the morning on the possibility of hiring the Colonel to work off an issue of State bonds which at the moment were dead stock on his hands.

By this time Klutchem, warmed by his host's Madeira and cheery fire, had not only become really interested in the man beside him, but had lost to a certain extent something of his blunt Wall Street manner and hard commercial way of looking at things. It was, therefore, not surprising to either Fitz or myself, who had watched the gradual adjustment of the two men, to hear the Colonel, who had now entirely forgotten all animosity towards his enemy say to Klutchem with great warmth of manner, and with the evident intention of

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

not being outdone in generosity at such a time :

“ I would like to show you that gaarden, suh. Perhaps some time I may have the pleasure of entertainin' you in my own home at Caartersville.”

Mr. Klutchem caught his breath. He saw the Colonel was perfectly sincere, and yet he could not but admit the absurdity of the situation. Invited to visit the private estate of a man who had caned him the day before, and against whom he was expected in the morning to make a complaint of assault and battery !

“ Oh, that's mighty kind, Colonel, but I guess you'll have to excuse me.”

The banker, as he spoke, glanced at Fitz. He didn't want to do anything to offend Fitz—certainly not until the papers in the Consolidated Smelting settlement

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

were complete and the documents signed—and yet he didn't see how he could accept.

“But I won't take no for an answer, suh. Miss Caarter will be here in a day or two, and I will only be too happy to discuss with her the date of yo' visit.”

Before Klutchem could refuse again Fitz stepped forward, and, standing over Mr. Klutchem's chair, dug his knuckles into the broker's back. The signal was unmistakable.

“Well, thank you, Colonel. I'll speak to my daughter about it, and if——”

“Yo' daughter, suh? Then I am sure the last obstacle is removed. Miss Caarter will be mo' than delighted, suh, to entertain her, too. I will ascertain my aunt's plans as soon as she arrives, and will let you

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

know definitely when she will be best p'epared for yo' entertainment."

When the party broke up, and Fitz and Mr. Klutchem had been helped on with their coats by Chad, Klutchem remarked to Fitz as we all walked through the tunnel :

"Queer old party, Fitzpatrick ; queerest I ever saw. You were right—not a crooked hair in his head. Glad I came. Of course I can't go down to his place—haven't got the time—but I bet you he'd be glad to see me if I did. Funny, too—poor as a rat and busted, and yet he never said 'Garden Spots,' once."

On my re-entering the house,—Fitz had gone on with Klutchem—Chad, who was waiting for me, took me into a corner of the hall and said in a voice filled with disappointment :

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

“What I tell ye, Major? Ain’t dat too bad? I ain’t never gwine ter forgib de Colonel for lettin’ him git away. Gor-A-Mighty! Did ye see de size of him—hardly git frough de gate! Why, der warn’t no chance o’ missin’ him. Colonel could a-filled him full o’ holes as a sieve.”

IV

THE Colonel's positive injunction that each one of his friends should call on every one of his guests within forty-eight hours of their arrival was never necessary in the case of Miss Ann Carter. One day was enough for me—one hour would have been more to my liking. Only consideration for her comfort, and the knowledge that she would be somewhat fatigued by her journey from Carter Hall northward, ever kept me away from her that long. Then, again, I knew that she wanted at least one entire day in which to straighten out the various domestic accounts of the little house in Bedford Place,

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

including that complicated and highly-prized pass-book of the "Grocerman."

And then Chad's delight when he opened the door with a sweep, his face a sunburst of smiles and announced Miss Carter's presence in the house! And the new note in the Colonel's voice—a note of triumph and love and pride! And the touches here and there inside the cosy rooms; touches that only a woman can give—a new curtain here, a pot of flowers there: all joyous happenings that made a visit to Aunt Nancy, as we loved to call her, one of the events to be looked forward to.

BUT it was not Chad who opened the door on this particular morning. That worthy ducky was otherwise occupied; in the kitchen, really, plucking the feathers from the canvas-back ducks. They had

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

been part of the dear lady's impedimenta, not to mention a huge turkey, a box of terrapin, and a barrel of Pongateague oysters, besides unlimited celery, Tolman sweet potatoes, and a particular brand of hominy, for which Fairfax County was famous.

I say it was not Chad at all who opened the door and took my card, but a scrap of a pickaninny about three feet high, with closely-cropped wool, two strings of glistening white teeth—*two*, for his mouth was always open; a pair of flaring ears like those of a mouse, and two little restless, wicked eyes that shone like black diamonds: the whole of him, with the exception of his cocoanut of a head, squeezed into a grey cloth suit bristling with brass buttons and worsted braid, a double row over his chest, and a stripe down each seam of his trousers.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Aunt Nancy's new servant !

The scrap held out a silver tray ; received my card with a dip of his head, threw back the door of the dining room, scraped his foot with the flourish of a clog dancer, and disappeared in search of his mistress.

Chad stepped from behind the door, his face in a broad grin. He had crept up the kitchen stairs, and had been watching the boy's performance from the rear room. His sleeves were rolled up and some of the breast feathers of the duck still stuck to his fingers.

"Don't dat beat de lan'! Major," he said to me. "Did ye see dem buttons on him? Ain't he a wonder? Clar to goodness looks like he's busted out wid brass measles. And he a-waitin' on de Mist'iss ! I ain't done nothin' but split myself a-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

laughin' ever since he come. MY!!!” and Chad bent himself double, the tears starting to his eyes.

“What’s his name, Chad?”

“Says his name’s Jeems. *Jeems*, mind ye!” Here Chad went into another convulsion. “Jim’s his real name, jes’ Jim. He’s one o’ dem Barbour niggers. Raised down t’other side de Barbour plantation long side of our’n. Miss Nancy’s been down to Richmond an’ since I been gone she don’t hab nobody to wait on her, an’ so she tuk dis boy an’ fixed him up in dese Richmond clothes. He says he’s free. *Free*, mind ye! Dat’s what all dese no count niggers is. But I’m watchin’ him, an’ de fust time he plays any o’ dese yer free tricks on me he’ll land in a spell o’ sickness,” and Chad choked himself with another chuckle.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

The door swung back.

"Miss Caarter say dat she'll be down in a minute," said the scrap.

Chad straightened his face and brought it down to a semblance of austerity ; always a difficult task with Chad.

"Who did you say was yere?" he asked.

"I didn't say—I handed her de kerd."

"How did you carry it?"

"In my pan."

"What did ye do wid de pan?"

The boy's face fell.

"I lef' it in de hall, suh."

"Suh! suh! Don't you 'suh' me. Ain't nobody 'suh' round yere but de Colonel. What I tell you to call me?"

"Uncle Chad."

"Dat's it, Uncle Chad. Now go 'long, honey, an' take yo' seat outside wid yo' pan ; plenty folks comin', now dey know

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

de Mist'iss here. Dar she is now. Dat's her step, on de stairs, Major. I doan' want her to catch me lookin' like dis. Drap into de kitchen, Major, as ye go out, I got sumpin' to show ye. Dem tarr'pins de Mist'iss fotch wid her make yo' mouf water."

Some women, when they enter a room, burst in like a child just out of school and overwhelm you with the joyousness of their greetings; others come in without a sound, settle into a seat and regale you in monotonous with histories of either the attendant misery or the expected calamity.

Aunt Nancy floated in like a bubble blown along a carpet, bringing with her a radiance, a charm, a gentleness, a graciousness of welcome, a gladness at seeing you, so sincere and so heartfelt, that I always felt as if a window had been opened let-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

ting in the sunshine and the perfume of flowers.

“ Oh, my dear Major ! ” and she held out her hand ; that tiny little hand which lace becomes so well, and that always suggests its morning baptism of rose water. Such a dainty white hand ! I always bend over and kiss it whenever I have the chance, trying my best to be the gallant I know she would like me to be.

After the little ceremony of my salutation was over I handed her to a seat, still holding her finger-tips, bowing low just as her own cavaliers used to do in the days when she had half the County at her feet. I love these make-believe ceremonies when I am with her—and then again I truly think she would not be so happy without them. This over I took my place opposite so I could watch her

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

face and the smiles playing across it—that face which the Colonel always said reminded him of “Summer roses a-bloom in October.”

We talked of her journey and of how she had stood the cold and how reluctant she had been at first to leave Carter Hall, especially at the Christmas season, and of the Colonel (not a word, of course, about the encounter with Klutchem—no one would have dared breathe a word of that to her), and then of the scrap of a pick-aninny she had brought with her.

“Isn’t he too amusing? I brought him up as much to help dear Chad as for any other reason. But he is incorrigible at times and I fear I shall have to send him back to his mother. I thought the livery might increase his self-respect, but it only seems to have turned his head. He

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

doesn't obey me at all, and is *so* forgetful. Chad is the only one of whom, I think, he is at all afraid."

A knock now sounded in the hall and I could hear the shuffling of Jim's feet, and the swinging back of the door. Then Fitz's card was brought in—not on the silver tray this time, but clutched in the monkey paw of the pickaninny.

Aunt Nancy looked at him with a certain well-assumed surprise and drew back from the proffered card.

"James, is that the way to bring me a card? Have I not told you often——"

The boy looked at her, his face in a tangle of emotions. "*De Pan!* Fo' Gord, Mist'iss, I done forgot dat pan," and with a spring he was out again, returning with Fitz's pasteboard on the silver tray, closely followed by that gentleman himself, who

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

was shaking with laughter over the incident.

“One of your body-guard, Aunt Nancy?” said Fitz, as he bent over and kissed her hand. It was astonishing how easily Fitz fell into these same old-time customs when he was with the dear lady—he, of all men.

“No, dear friend, one of the new race of whom I am trying to make a good servant. His grandmother in slave times belonged to a neighbor of ours, and this little fellow is the youngest of six. I’ve just been telling the Major what a trial he is to me. And now let me look at you. Ah! you have been working too hard. I see it in your eyes. Haven’t you had some dreadful strain lately?”

Fitz declared on his honor, with one hand over his upper watch pocket, and



"One of your body-guard, Aunt Nancy?"

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

the other still in hers, that he never felt better in his life, and that so idle had he become lately, that it was hard work for him to keep employed. And then Aunt Nancy made him sit beside her on the haircloth sofa, the one on which Fitz would not permit the Colonel to sleep, and I, being nearest, tucked a cushion under her absurdly small feet and rearranged about her shoulders her Indian mull shawl, which didn't require any rearranging at all. And after Fitz had told the dear lady for the third time how glad he was to see her, and after she had told him how glad she was to see both of us, and how she hoped dear George would soon secure the money necessary to build his railroad, so that we could all come to Carter Hall for next Christmas, she adding gravely that she really couldn't see any need for the

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

road's existence or any hope of its completion, although she never said so to dear George, she being a woman and not expected to know much of such things ;—after, I say, all these delightful speeches and attentions and confidences had been indulged in, Aunt Nancy bent her head, turned her sweet face framed in the lace cap and ribbons, first towards me and then back to Fitz again—she had been talking to Fitz all this time, I listening—and said with the air of a fairy godmother entertaining two children :

“And now I’ve got a great Christmas surprise for both of you, and you shall have one guess apiece as to what it is.”

Fitz, with the memories of a former Christmas at Carter Hall still fresh in mind, and knowing the dear lady’s gener-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

osity, and having seen the biggest bundle of feathers and the longest pair of legs he had ever laid his eyes on hanging head down on the measly wall of the shabby yard as he entered, screwed up his eyes, cudgelled his brain by tapping his forehead with his forefinger, and blurted out :

“ Wild turkey stuffed with chestnuts.”

Aunt Nancy laughed until her side curls shook.

“ Oh, you dreadful gourmand ! Not a *bit* like a turkey. How mortified you will be when you find out ! Go and stand in the corner, sir, with your face to the wall. Now, Major, it's your turn.”

Fitz began to protest that he ought to have another chance, and that it had slipped out before he knew it, since he had never forgotten a brother of that same bird, one that he had eaten at her own

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

table ; but the little lady wouldn't hear another syllable, and waved him away with great dignity, whereupon Fitz buried his fat face in his hands, and said that life was really not worth the living, and that if anybody would suggest a comfortable way of committing suicide he would adopt it at once.

When my turn came, I, remembering the buttons on "Jeems," guessed a livery for Chad, at which the dear lady laughed more merrily than before, and Fitz remarked in a disgusted tone that the dense stupidity of some men was one of the characteristics of the time.

"No ; it's nothing to eat and it's nothing to wear. It's a most charming young lady who at my earnest solicitation has consented to dine with us, and to whom I want you two young gentlemen (Fitz is

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

forty if he's a day, and looks it) to be most devoted."

"Pretty?" asked Fitz, pulling up his collar—prinking in mock vanity.

"Yes, and better than pretty."

"Young?" persisted Fitz.

"Young, and most entertaining."

"Now listen both of you and I will tell you all about it. She lives up in one of your most desolate streets, Lafayette Place, I think, they call it, and in such a sombre house that it looks as if the windows had never been opened. Her mother is dead, and such a faded, hopeless-looking woman takes care of the house, a relation of the father's, I understand, who is a business friend of George's, and with whom he tells me he once had a slight misunderstanding. George did not want Christmas to pass with these differences unsettled, and so, of

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

course, I went to call the very day I arrived, and invited her and her father to dine with us on Christmas Eve. We always celebrate our Christmas then as you both know, on account of our old custom of giving Christmas day to our servants. And I am *so* glad I went. I did not, of course, see the father. Oh, it would make your heart ache to see the inside of that house. Everything costly and solid, and yet everything so joyless. I always feel sorry for such homes,—no flowers about, no books that are not locked up, no knick-knacks nor pretty things. I hope you will both help me to make her Christmas Eve a happy one. You perhaps may know her father, Mr. Fitzpatrick,—he is in Wall Street I hear, and his name is Klutchem.”

Fitz, in his astonishment, so far forgot himself as to indulge in a low whistle.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

"Then you *do* know him?"

"Oh, very well."

"And you tell me that Mr. Klutchem is really coming to dinner and going to bring his daughter?" asked Fitz, in a tone that made his surprise all the more marked.

"Yes; George had a note from him this morning saying his daughter would be here before dark and he would come direct from his office and meet her here in time for dinner. Isn't it delightful? You will be quite charmed with our guest, I'm sure. And about the father—tell me something of him?" Aunt Nancy inquired in her sweetest voice.

"About Mr. Klutchem? Well! Yes, to be sure. Why, Klutchem! Yes, of course. A most genial and kindly man," answered Fitz, controlling himself; "a little eccentric at times I have heard, but not more so

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

than most men of his class. Not a man of much taste, perhaps, but most generous. Would give you anything in the world he didn't want, and be so delighted when you took it off his hands. Insisted on giving me a lot of stock the other day, but of course I wouldn't take it." This was said with so grave a face that its point escaped the dear lady.

"How very kind of him. Perhaps that is where his daughter gets her charm," replied Aunt Nancy, with a winning smile.

There is no telling what additional mendacities regarding the Klutchem family Fitz, who had now regained his equilibrium, would have indulged in, had I not knit my eyebrows at him behind Aunt Nancy's back as a warning to the mendacitor not to mislead the dear lady, whose disappointment, I knew, would only be

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

the greater when she met Klutchem face to face.

When I had risen to take my leave Fitz excused himself for a moment and followed me into the hall.

“Klutchem coming to dinner, Major, and going to bring his daughter? What the devil do you think is up? If the Colonel wasn't so useless financially I'd think Klutchem had some game up his sleeve. But if that is so, why bring his daughter? My lawyer told me to-day the assault and battery case is all settled, so it can't be that. Wonder if the Colonel has converted Klutchem as to the proper way of running a bank? No, that's nonsense! Klutchem would skin a flea and sell the tallow, no matter what the Colonel said to him. Coming to dinner! Well, that gets me!”

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

As I shut the front door behind me and stopped for a minute on the top step overlooking the yard, I caught sight of the grocer emerging from the tunnel with a basket on his arm for Chad, who was standing below me outside his kitchen door with the half-picked duck in his hand. The settlement of "Misser Grocerman's" unpaid accounts by Miss Nancy on one of her former visits to Bedford Place had worked a double miracle—Chad no longer feared the dispenser of fine wines and other comforts, and the dispenser himself would have emptied his whole shop into Chad's kitchen and waited months for his pay had that loyal old servant permitted it. This was evident from the way in which Chad dropped the half-picked duck on a bench beside the door and hurried forward to help unpack the basket; and the deferen-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

tial smile on the grocer's face as he took out one parcel after another, commenting on their quality and cheapness.

I had promised Chad to stop long enough to inspect Miss Nancy's "tarr'-pins," and so I waited until Chad's duties were over.

"That's the cheekiest little coon ever come into the store," I hear the grocer say with a laugh. "I'd a-slid him out on his ear if he'd said much more."

Chad looked over his pile of bundles—they lay up on his arm; the top one held in place by his chin—and asked with some anxiety:

"Who, Jim? What did he do?"

"Do! He waltzed in yesterday afternoon with his head up and his under lip sticking out as if he owned the place. When I told him to take the sugar back

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

with him, he said he wasn't carrying no bundles for nobody, he was waiting on Miss Carter. He's out at the gate now."

"Do ye hear dat, Major? Ain't dat 'nough to make a body sick? I been 'spectin' dis ever since he come. I'm gwinter stop dis foolishness short off."

The old darky waited until the grocer had reached the street, then he shouted into the gloom of the narrow passage :

"Here, Jim. Come here."

The scrap in buttons slammed to the wicket gate and came running through the tunnel.

"What you tell dat gemman yisterday when I sont you for dat sugar, wid yo' lip stickin' out big 'nough for a body ter sit on?"

The boy hung his head.



The boy hung his head.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

“You’s e waitin’ on Miss Caarter, is ye, an’ ye ain’t caarryin’ no bundles? If I ever hear ye sass anybody round here agin, white or black, I’ll tear dem buttons off ye an’ skin ye alive—you’s e caarryin’ what I send ye for—do ye hear dat? *Free*, is ye? You’s e free wid yo’ sass an’ dat’s all de freedom you got.”

“I—didn’t know—yer want me ter—caa’ry it back,” said the boy in a humble tone, but with the twinkle of a smouldering coal in his eye.

“Ye didn’t? Who did ye think was gwine ter caa’ry it back for ye? Maybe it was de Colonel or de Mist’iss or *me*? ” Chad’s voice had now risen to a high pitch, and with a touch of sarcasm in it which was biting. “Pretty soon you’ll ’spec’ somebody gwine to call for ye in dere caa’ridge. Yo’ idea o’ freedom is to wait

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

on nobody and hab no manners. What ye got in yo' hand?"

"Cigarette white boy gimme,"—and the boy dropped the burning end on the brick pavement of the yard.

"Dat's mo' freedom, an' dat's all dis po' white trash is gwine to do for ye—stuffin' yo' head wid lies, an' yo' mouf wid a wad o' nastiness. Now go 'long an' git yo' pan."

Chad waited until the boy had mounted the steps and entered the house, then he turned to me.

"Po' li'l chin'ka'pin—he don't know no better. How's he gwine to git a bringin' up? Miss Nancy tryin' to teach him, but she ain't gwine make nuffin' of him. He's got pizened by dis freedom talk, an' he ain't gwine to git cured. Fust thing ye know he'll begin to think he's

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

good as white folks, an' when he's got dat in his head he's done for. I'm gwine to speak to de Mist'iss 'bout dat boy, an' see if sompin can't be done to save him fo' it gits too late; ain't nuffin' gwine to do him no good but a barr'l stave—hear dat—a barr'l stave!”

The Colonel had come in quietly and stood listening. I had heard the click of the outer gate, but supposed it was the grocer returning with the additional supplies.

“Who's Chad goin' to thresh, Major?” the Colonel asked, with a smile as he put his arm over my shoulder.

“Miss Nancy's pickaninny,” I answered.

“What, little Jim?” There was a tone of surprise now in the Colonel's voice.

Chad stood abashed for a moment. He had stowed away the groceries, and had

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

the duck in his hand again, his fingers fumbling among its feathers.

“ ‘Scuse me, Colonel, I ain’t gwine whale him, of co’se, ’thout yo’ permission, but he’s dat puffed up he’ll bust fo’ long.”

“ What’s he been up to? ”

“ Sassin’ Misser Grocerman—runnin’ to de gate wid his head out like a tar’pin’s, smokin’ dese yer paper seegars dat smell de whole place up vill’nous, ’stid of waitin’ on de Mist’iss.”

“ And you think beatin’ him will do him any good, Chad? How many times did yo’ Marster John beat you? ”

Chad looked up, and a smile broke over his face.

“ I don’t reckellmember airy lick de Marster ever laid on me.”

“ Raised you pretty well, didn’t he, Chad? ”

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

"Yas, sah—dat he did."

"Anybody beat you since you grew up?"

"No, sah."

"Pretty good, Chad, ain't you?"

"I try to be, sah."

"Well now, be a little patient with that boy. It isn't his fault that he's sp'ilt; it's part of the damnable system this Gov'ment has put upon us since the war. Am I right, Major?"

I nodded assent.

Chad pulled out a handful of feathers from the duck, dropped them into a barrel near where we stood in the yard, and said, as if his mind was finally made up :

"Co'se, Colonel, I ain't nuffin' to say jes' 'cept dis. When I was dat boy's age I was runnin' 'round barefoot an' putty nigh naked, my shirt out o' my pants haalf

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

de time ; but Marse John tuk care o' me, an' when I got hongry I knowed whar dey was sumpin to eat an' I got it. Dat boy ain't had nobody take care o' him till de Mist'iss tuk him, and haalf de time he went hongry ; no manners, no bringin' up—runnin' wid po' white trash, gittin' his head full o' fool notions 'stid o' waitin' on his betters. Now look at him. Come in yere yisterday mornin', an' want borry my bresh to black his shoes. Den he must bresh his clothes wid yo' bresh—yo' bresh, mind you ! I cotched him at it. Den he gits on his toes an' squints at hissself in de Mist'iss glass—I cotched him at dat, too—an' he ugly as one o' dem black tree-toads. You know what done dat ? Dem Richmond clothes he's got on. I tell ye, Colonel, sumpin gotter be done, or dem buttons 'll spile dat chile."

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

The Colonel laughed heartily.

"What does Miss Nancy say about yo' barr'l stave?"

"She don't say nuffin', 'cause she don't know."

"Well, don't you thresh Jim till you see her."

"No, sah."

"And Chad?"

"Yes, sah."

"When you do, pick out a little stave. Come, Major, go back with me for just ten minutes mo' and see the dea'est woman in the world."

V

THE day before Christmas was a never-to-be-forgotten day in Bedford Place. Great preparations were being made for the event of the evening, and everybody helped.

Little Jim under the tutelage of Chad, and in hourly fear of the promised thrashing—it had never gone beyond the promise since the Colonel's talk—had so far forgotten his clothes and his dignity as to load himself with Christmas greens—one long string wound around his body like a boa constrictor—much to the amusement of the Colonel, who was looking out of the dining-room window when he emerged

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

from the tunnel. Aunt Nancy went all the way to the grocery for some big jars for the flowers I had sent her (not to mention a bunch of roses of the Colonel's) and brought one of the pots back in her own hand ; and spoke in so low and gentle a voice when she purchased them that everybody in the place ceased talking to listen.

The Colonel busied himself drawing, in the most careful and elaborate manner, the wax-topped corks of certain be-cobwebbed bottles that had been delivered the night before by no less a person than Duncan's own agent, and to one of which was attached Fitz's visiting card bearing his compliments and best wishes. The contents of these crusted bottles the Colonel had duly emptied into two cut-glass decanters with big stoppers—heirlooms from Carter

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Hall—placing the decanters themselves in two silver coasters bearing the Coat-of-Arms of his family, and the whole combination on the old-fashioned sideboard which graced the wall opposite the fireplace. Chad, with the aid of the grocer, had produced as assistant below stairs, from a side street behind Jefferson Market, a saddle-colored female who wore flowers in her hat, and who, to his infinite amusement, called him “Mister.”

“Can’t do nothin’ big, Major, dis place’s so mighty small,” he called to me from his kitchen door as I mounted the yard steps, “but it’s gwine to smell mighty good round here ’bout dinner time.”

Under the deft touches of all these willing hands it is not to be wondered at that the Colonel’s cosy rooms developed a quality unknown to them before, delightful

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

as they had always been: The table boasted an extra leaf (an extra leaf was always ready for use in every dining-room of the Colonel's); the candlesticks, old family plate and andirons, dulled by the winter's use, shone with phenomenal brightness; the mantel supported not only half a dozen bottles of claret (Duncan's cellars, Fitz's selection) but a heap of roses that reached as high as the clock, while over the door, around the windows and high up over the two fireplaces—everywhere, in fact, where a convenient nail or hook could be found—were entwined in loops and circles, the Christmas greens and holly berries that little Jim had staggered under.

The crowning sensation of the coming event stood in the corner of the rear room,—a small Christmas tree grown in the woods behind Carter Hall. A little

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

tree with all its branches perfect ; large enough to hold its complement of candles ; small enough to stand in the centre of the table within reach of everybody's hand. Aunt Nancy had picked it out herself. She must always respect the sentiment. No bought tree would do for her on such an occasion. It must be to the manor born, nourished in her own soil, warmed by the same sun and watered by the same rains. The bringing of a tree from her own home at Carter Hall to cheer the Colonel's temporary resting place in Bedford Place, was to her like the bringing of a live coal from old and much loved embers with which to start a fire on a new hearth.

These several preparations complete—and it was quite late in the day when they were complete (in the twilight really)—

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Chad threw a heap of wood beside the fireplace, brushed the hearth of its ashes, laid a pile of India Blue plates in front of its cheery blaze (no crime, the Colonel often said, was equal to putting a hot duck on a cold plate), placed the Colonel's chair in position, arranged a cushion in Aunt Nancy's empty rocker; gave a few finishing touches to the table; stopped a moment in the kitchen below to give some instructions to the saddle-colored female as to the length of time a canvas-back should remain in the oven, and stepped back into his little room, there to array himself in white jacket and gloves, the latter tucked into his outside pocket ready for instant use.

During these final preparations the Colonel was upstairs donning a costume befitting the occasion—snow-white waistcoat, white scarf and patent-leather pumps,

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

with little bows over the toes, limp as a poodle's ears, and his time-honored coat, worn wide open of course, the occasion being one of great joyousness and good cheer. These necessities of toilet over, the Colonel descended the narrow staircase, threw wide the dining-room door, shook me cordially by the hand with the manner of a man welcoming a distinguished guest whom he had not seen for years (I had just arrived); bowed to Chad as if he had been one of a long line of servants awaiting the coming of their lord (festive occasions always produced this frame of mind in the Colonel); laid a single white rose beside the plates of his two lady guests—one for Miss Carter and the other for Miss Klutchem—and glancing around the apartment expressed his admiration of all that had been done.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Then he settled himself in his easy chair, with his feet on the fender, and spread his moist, newly-washed hands to the blaze.

Aunt Nancy now entered in a steel-grey silk and new cap and ribbons, her delicate, frail shoulders covered by a light scarf, little Jim following behind her with her ball of yarn and needles, and a low stool for her feet. The only change in Jim was a straggly groove down the middle of his wool, where he had attempted a "part" like Chad's.

"I'm glad Mr. Klutchem is comin', Nancy," said the Colonel when the dear lady had taken her seat with Jim behind her chair. "From what you tell me of his home I'm afraid that he must pass a great many lonely hours. And then again I cannot forget his generosity to a friend of mine once in his hour of trial."

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

“What was the trouble between you and Mr. Klutchem, George?” she asked in reply, spreading out her skirts and taking the knitting from Jim’s hands.

The Colonel hesitated and for a moment did not answer. Aunt Nancy raised her eyes to his and waited.

“I diffe’ed from him on the value of some secu’ities, Nancy, and for a time the argument became quite heated.”

“And it left some ill-feeling?”

“Oh, no; on the contrary, it seemed to open a way for an important settlement in a friend’s affairs which may have the best and most lastin’ results. I believe I am quite within the mark, Major, when I make that statement,” added the Colonel, turning to me.

“No doubt of it, Colonel,” I answered. “That same friend told me that he hadn’t

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

enjoyed anything so much for years as Mr. Klutchem's visit to his office that morning."

"Well, I am so glad," said Aunt Nancy—"so glad!" The "friend's" name had been too obviously concealed by both the Colonel and myself for her to press any inquiries in that direction. "And you have not seen the daughter?" She continued.

"No, Mr. Klutchem was ill at a friend's house when I called on him once befo', and his family were not in the room. I shall have that pleasure for the first time when she arrives."

Chad now entered, bowed low to his Mistress, his invariable custom, and began to light the candles on the mantel-piece and sideboard, and then those in the two big silver candlesticks which decorated

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

each end of the table, with its covers for six. Little Jim still stood behind his Miss Nancy's chair: he was not to be trusted with any of Chad's important duties.

There came a knock at the door.

"That's dear Fitz," said the Colonel.
"He promised to come early."

Chad looked meaningly at the scrap, and little Jim, in answer to the sound of Fitz's knuckles, left the room, picking up his "pan" from the hall table as he answered the summons.

At this moment the dear lady dropped her ball of yarn, and the Colonel and I stooped down to recover it. This was a duty from which even Chad was relieved when either of us was present. While we were both on our knees groping around the legs of the sideboard, the door opened softly, and a sweet, low voice said:

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

“Please, I’m Katy Klutchem, and I’ve come to the Christmas Tree.”

The Colonel twisted his head quickly.

A little girl of six or eight, her chubby cheeks aglow with the cold of the winter twilight, a mass of brown curls escaping from her hat framing a pretty face, stood looking at him—he was still on his knees—with wide, wondering eyes. He had expected to welcome a young woman of twenty, he told me afterwards, not a child. Aunt Nancy inadvertently, perhaps, or because she supposed he knew, had omitted any reference to her age. I, too, had fallen into the same error.

The dear lady without rising from her seat held out her two hands joyously :

“Oh, you darling little thing! Come here until I take off your hat and coat.”

The Colonel had now risen to his feet,

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

the ball of yarn in his hand, his eyes still on the apparition. No child had ever stepped foot inside the cosy quarters since his occupation. Katy returned his gaze with that steadfast, searching look common to some children, summing up by intuition the dangers and the man. Then, with her face breaking into a smile at the Colonel, she started towards Aunt Nancy.

But the Colonel had come to his senses now.

“So you are not a grown-up lady at all,” he cried, with a joyous note in his voice, as he advanced towards her, “but just a dear little girl.”

“Why, did you think I was grown-up? I’m only seven. Oh, what a nice room, and is the Christmas tree here?”

“It is not lighted yet, dearie,” replied Aunt Nancy, her fingers busy with the top



.. Please, I'm Katy Klutchem, and I've come for the Christmas tree."

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

button of the child's cloak, the eager, expectant face twisted around as if she was looking for something. "It's over there in the corner."

"Let me show it to you," said the Colonel, and he took her hand. "Major, please bring one of the candles."

The child's eyes sought the Colonel's face. The first look she had given him as she entered the room had settled all doubt in her mind; children know at a glance whom they can trust.

"Please do," she answered simply, and her grasp closed over his. The cloak and hat were off now, and Jim was bearing them upstairs to be laid on Miss Nancy's bed.

As the small, frail hand touched his own I saw a strange look come into the Colonel's eyes. It was evidently all he

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

could do to keep from stooping down and kissing her.

Instinctively my mind went back to a night not long before when I had found him sitting by his fire. "There is but one thing in all the world, Major," he said to me then, "sweeter than the song of a robin in the spring, and that is the laughter of a child."

I knew therefore, as I looked at these two, what the little hand that lay in his meant to him.

So I held the candle and the Colonel lighted the tip end of just one tiny taper to show her how it burned, and what a pretty light it made shining through the green; and Katy clapped her hands and said it was beautiful, and such a darling little tree, and not at all like the big one in the Sunday School that reached nearly

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

to the ceiling, and that nobody dared to touch. And then we all went back to the fire and the Colonel's chair, and before I knew it he had her by his side with his arm around her shoulders, telling her stories, while Aunt Nancy and Jim and I sat listening.

And so absorbed was he in the new life, and so happy with the child, that he only gave Fitz three fingers to shake when that friend of his heart came in, and never once said he was glad to see him—an unprecedented omission—and never once made the slightest allusion to the expected guest of the evening, Mr. Klutchem, now that his daughter had turned out to be a child of seven instead of a full-grown woman of twenty.

The Colonel told her of the great woods behind Carter Hall, where the Christmas

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

tree had grown, and the fox with the white tail that lived there, and that used to pop into his hole in the snow, and how you'd pass right by and never see him because his tail, which was the biggest part of him, was so white; and the woodpeckers that bored into the bark with their long, sharp bills; and finally of the big turkeys that strutted and puffed their feathers and spread their tails about and ran so fast nothing could catch them.

"Not even a dog?" interrupted the child. She had crawled up into his arms now and was looking up into his face with wondering eyes.

"Dogs!" answered the Colonel contemptuously, "why, these turkeys would be up and gone befo' a dog could turn 'round."

"Tell me what they are like. Have

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

they long—long legs—so?” and she stretched out her arms.

“Oh, longer—terrible long legs—long as *this*”—and the Colonel’s arms went out to their full length.

Jim’s eyes were now popping out of his head, but his place was behind his Mistress’s chair, ready for her orders, and he had had so many scoldings that day that he thought it best not to move.

“And does he puff himself out like a real turkey in the picture books?”

“Oh, worse than a real turkey,—big as *so*”—and the Colonel’s arms went round in a circle.

The child thought hard for a moment until she had the picture of the strutting gobbler fastened in her mind, and said, cuddling closer to the Colonel: “Tell me some more.”

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

"About turkeys?"

"Yes, about turkeys."

"About wild ones or tame ones?"

"Was that a wild one that the dogs couldn't catch?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me about some tame ones. Do they live in the woods?"

"No, they live in the barnyard with the chickens, and the cows, and the horses. Why, did you never see one?"

"Yes, but I want to hear you tell about them—that's better than seeing."

Jim could hold in no longer. He had become so excited that he kept rubbing one shoe against the other, twisting and squirming like an eel. At last he burst out:

"An' one ol' gobble-gobble was dat ornery, Mammy Henny shut him up in de coop!"

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Aunt Nancy turned in astonishment, and Chad, who had come in with some dishes, was about to crush him with a look, when the Colonel said, with a sly twinkle in his eye :

“What did he do, Jim?”

“Jes’ trompled de li’l teeny chickens an’ eat up all de corn an’ wouldn’t let nobody come nigh him. An’ he was dat swelled up!”

Katy laughed, and turning to the Colonel, said :

“Tell me about that one.”

The Colonel ruminated for a moment, looked at Chad with a half-humorous expression, and motioned to little Jim to come over and stand by his chair so that he could hear the better, his own arm still about Katy, her head on his shoulder.

“About that big gobbler, Katy, that

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

was so bad they had to put him in a coop? ”

“ Yes, that very one.”

“ Well, when I fust knew him he was a little teeny turkey—oh, not near so high as Jim ; ’bout up to Jim’s knees, I reckon. He’d follow ’round after his mammy and go where she wanted him to go and mind her like a nice little turkey as he was. He didn’t live on my plantation then—he lived on Judge Barbour’s plantation next to mine. Well, one day, Aunt Nancy—that dear lady over there—wanted a fine young turkey, and this little knee-high turkey was growin’ to be a big turkey, and so she brought him over and gave him the run of the barnyard.

“ She was just as good to him as she could be. She made a nice clean place for him to live in, so his feathers wouldn’t

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

get dirty any mo', and he didn't have to run 'round lookin' for grasshoppers and beetles and little worms as he did at home, but he had a nice bowl of mush eve'y day and a place to go to sleep in all by himself, and Aunt Nancy did everythin' she could to make him comfo'table.

“ Well, what do you think happened? Just as soon as that turkey found out he was bein' taken caare of better than the hens and the roosters and all the other little turkeys he had left at home, he began to put on airs. He breshed his feathers out and he strutted around same as if he owned the whole barnyard, and he'd go down to the pond and look at himself in the water; and he got so proud that whenever old Mrs. Hen or old Mr. Rooster would say 'Good mornin'' to him as kind and as nice as could be, he

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

wouldn't answer politely, but he'd stick up his head and go 'Gobble-gobble-gobble!' and then he'd swell up again and puff out his chest and march himself off. Pretty soon he got so sassy that nobody could live with him. Why, he didn't care what he did and who he stepped on. He trampled on two po' little chicks one day that were just out of the shell and mashed them flat and did all sorts of dreadful things."

"What an awful turkey! Poor little chickens," sighed Katy. "Go on."

"Next thing he did was to steal off and smoke cigarettes."

Katy raised her head and looked up into the Colonel's eyes.

"Why, turkeys can't smoke, can they?"

"Oh, no — of co'se not — I forgot.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

That's another story and I got them mixed up. Where was I? Oh, yes, when he got so sassy."

Katy dropped her head on his shoulder again. Jim was now listening with all his might, his only fear being that Chad or Miss Nancy or the knocker on the front door would summon him before the story was ended.

"Well," continued the Colonel, "that went on and on and on till there wasn't any livin' with him. Even dear Aunt Nancy couldn't get along with him, which is a dreadful thing to say of anybody. So one day" — here the Colonel's voice dropped to a tone of grave importance — "one day—Mammy Henny—that's the wife of Chad over there by the table, crep' up behind this wicked, sassy little turkey, when he was swellin' around so big he

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

couldn't see his feet, and she grabbed him by the neck and two legs, and befo' he knew where he was, plump he went into a big coop, and the door was shut tight. He hollered and squawked and flapped his wings terrible, but that didn't make any difference; in he went and there he stayed. He pushed with his long legs, and stuck his head out through the slats, and did all he could to get out, but it was no use. Next day Mammy Henny got a great big knife—oh, an awful long knife——”

“How long?” asked the child.

“Oh, a dreadful long knife—’most as long as Jim, here”—and the Colonel laid his hand on the boy’s shoulder—“and she sharpened it on a big grindstone, and Mammy Henny put some corn in the little trough outside the slats, and when this bad, wicked turkey poked his head out

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

—WHACK—went the knife, and off went his head, and he was dead—dead—dead ! ”

As the solemn words fell from his lips, the Colonel broke into a laugh, and in a burst of tenderness threw his arms around the child and kissed her as if he would like to eat her up.

Katy was clapping her hands now.

“ Oh, I'm just *too* glad. And the poor little chickies—served him just right. I was afraid he'd get out and run away.”

The Colonel stole a look at Jim. The scrap stood looking into the fire, a wondering expression on his face. How much of the story was truth and how much fiction evidently puzzled Jim.

During the telling everybody in the room, Fitz, Miss Nancy—all of us, in fact,—had been watching Katy's delight and Jim's eager brown face, turned to the Colo-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

nel, the whites of his eyes big as saucers. Watching, too, the Colonel's impartial manner to both of his listeners—black and white alike—the only distinction being that the black boy stood, while the white child lay nestled in his arms.

Chad, as the story progressed, had crept up behind the Colonel's chair, where he could hear without being seen, and was listening as eagerly as if he were a boy again. He had often told me that his old master, the Colonel's father, used to tell him and the Colonel stories when they were boys together, but I had never seen the Colonel in the rôle before.

When the allusion to the cigarettes escaped the Colonel's lips a smile overspread Chad's visage, and a certain triumphant look crept into his eyes. With the child's laughter still ringing through

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

the room, Chad tapped Jim on the arm, led him to one side, held his lean, wrinkled finger within an inch of the boy's nose and said in a sepulchral tone:

“Did ye hear dat? Do ye know who dat sassy, low-lived, mizzable, no-count, ornery turkey was, dat kep’ a-swellin’ up, thinkin’ he was *free* an’ somebody great till dat caarvin’ knife tuk his head off? Dat’s *you*!”

In the midst of this scene, Katy still in the Colonel’s arms, Aunt Nancy knitting quietly, talking to Fitz in an undertone, and I forming part of the circle around the fire, watching the Colonel’s delight and joy over his new guest—the dining-room door was pushed open, and Mr. Klutchem stepped in.

“I found the outside door ajar, Colo-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

nel," he blurted out, "and heard you all laughing, and so I just walked in. Been here long, Katy?"

For an instant I was sorry he had come; it was like the dropping of a stone into a still pool.

The child slid out from the Colonel's lap, with an expression on her face as if she had been caught in some act she should be ashamed of, and stood close to the Colonel's chair, as if for protection. Aunt Nancy, Fitz, and I rose to our feet to welcome the newcomer. The Colonel, having to pull himself out from the depths of his chair, was the last to rise. He had been so absorbed in the child that he had entirely forgotten both the father and the dinner. It, however, never took the Colonel long to recover his equilibrium where a matter of courtesy was concerned.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

“My dear Mr. Klutchem,” he cried, throwing out his chest, and extending his hand graciously. “This is, indeed, a pleasure. Permit me to present you to my aunt, Miss Caarter, of Virginia, who has left her home to gladden our Christmas with her presence. The gentlemen, of co’sse, you already know. Yo’ little daughter, suh, is a perfect sunbeam. She has so crept into our hearts that we feel as if we never wanted her to leave us——” and he laid his hand on the child’s head.

The banker shook hands with Aunt Nancy, remarked that he was sorry he had not been at home when she called, extended the same five fingers to me, and again in turn to Fitz, and sat down on the edge of a chair which Jim had dragged up for him. Katy walked over and stood by

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

her father's knee. Her holiday seemed over.

"Rather sharp weather, isn't it?" Mr. Klutchem began, rubbing his hands and looking about him. He had not forgotten the cheeriness of the rooms the day of his first visit; in their holiday attire they were even more delightful. "I suppose, Colonel, you don't have such weather in your State," he continued.

The Colonel, who was waiting for a cue—any cue served the Colonel, weather, politics, finance, everything but morals and gossip, these he never discussed, launched out in his inimitable way describing the varied kinds of weather indigenous to his part of the State: the late spring frosts with consequent damage to the peach crop; the heat of summer; the ice storms and the heavy falls of soft snow

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

that were gone by mid-day; the banker describing in return the severities of the winters in Vermont, his own State, and the quality of the farming land which, he said, with a dry laugh, often raised four stone fences to the acre, and sometimes five.

Before the two had talked many minutes I saw to my delight that the waters of the deep pool which I feared had become permanently troubled by the sudden arrival of the broker, were assuming their former tranquil condition. Aunt Nancy resumed her knitting, awaiting the time when Chad should announce dinner. Katy, finding that her father had no immediate use for her—not an unusual experience with Katy—moved off and stood by Aunt Nancy, watching the play of her needles, the dear lady talking to her in a low voice, while Fitz and I put our heads

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

together, and with eyes and ears open, followed with close attention the gradual thawing out of the hard ice of the practical man of affairs under the warm sun of the Colonel's hospitality.

Soon the long expected hour arrived, a fact made known first by the saddle-colored female to Jim standing at the head of the stairs, and who promptly conveyed it to Chad's ear in a whisper that was heard all over the room, and finally by Chad himself, who announced the welcome news to Miss Nancy with a flourish that would have done credit to the master of ceremonies at a Lord Mayor's banquet; drawing out a chair for her on the right of the Colonel, another on his left for Mr. Klutchem, and a third for Miss Klutchem, who was seated between Fitz and me. He then stationed Jim, now thoroughly

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

humbled by the chastening he had received, at the door in the hall to keep open an unbroken line of communication between the fragrant kitchen below and the merry table above.

The seating of the guests brought the cosy circle together—and what a picture it was: The radiance of Aunt Nancy's face as she talked to one guest and another, twisting her head like a wren's to see Mr. Klutchem the better when the Colonel stood up to carve the ducks; and the benignant, patriarchal, bless-you-my-children smile that kept irradiating the Virginian's visage as, knife in hand, he descanted on the various edibles and drinkables that made his native County a rare place to be born in; and Mr. Klutchem's quiet, absorbed manner, so different from his boisterous outbreaks—a fact

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

which astonished Fitz most of all; and Katy's unrestrained laughter breaking in at all times like a bird's, and Chad's beaming face and noiseless tread, taking the dishes from Jim's hands as carefully as an antiquary would so many curios, and placing them without a sound before his master—yes, all these things indeed made a picture that could never be forgotten.

As to the quality and toothsome-ness of the several and various dishes—roast, broiled, and baked—that kept constantly arriving, there was, there could be, but one opinion:

Nobody had ever seen such oysters; nobody had ever eaten such terrapin! Nobody had ever tasted such ducks!—so Mr. Klutchem said, and he ought to have known, for he had the run of the Clubs. Nobody had crunched such celery nor

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

had revelled in such sweet potatoes; nor had anybody since the beginning of the world ever smacked their lips over such a ham.

“One of our razor-backs, Mr. Klutch-em,” said the Colonel; “fed on ‘acorns, and so thin that he can jump through a palin’ fence and never lose a hair. When a pig down our way gets so fat that a darky can catch him, we have no use for him”—and the Colonel laughed—a laugh which was echoed in a suppressed grin by Chad, the witticism not being intended for him.

Soon there stole over every one in the room that sense of peace and contentment which always comes when one is at ease in an atmosphere where love and kindness reign. The soft light of the candles, the low, rich color of the simple room

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

with its festoons of cedar and pine, the aroma of the rare wine, and especially the spicy smell of the hemlock warmed by the burning tapers—that rare, unmistakable smell which only Christmas greens give out and which few of us know but once a year, and often not then; all had their effect on host and guests. Katy became so happy that she lost all fear of her father and prattled on to Fitz and me (we had pinned to her frock the rose the Colonel had bought for the “grown-up daughter,” and she was wearing it just as Aunt Nancy wore hers), and Aunt Nancy in her gentle voice talked finance to Mr. Klutchem in a way that made him open his eyes, and Fitz laughingly joined in, giving a wide berth to anything bearing on “corners” or “combinations” or “shorts” and “longs,” while I, to spare

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

Aunt Nancy, kept one eye on Jim, winking at him with it once or twice when he was about to commit some foolishness, and so the happy feast went on.

As to the Colonel, he was never in better form. To him the occasion was the revival of the old Days of Plenty—the days his soul coveted and loved: his to enjoy, his to dispense.

But if it had been delightful before, what was it when Chad, after certain mysterious movements in the next room, bore aloft the crowning glory of the evening, and placed it with all its candles in the centre of the table, the Colonel leaning far back in his chair to give him room, his coat thrown wide, his face aglow, his eyes sparkling with the laughter that always kept him young!

Then it was that the Colonel gathering

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

under his hand the little sheaf of paper lamplighters which Chad had twisted, rose from his seat, picked up a slender glass that had once served his father ("only seben o' dat kind left," Chad told me) and which that faithful servitor had just filled from the flow of the old decanter of like period, and with a wave of his hand as if to command attention, said, in a clear, firm voice that indicated the dignity of the occasion :

" My friends,—my *vehy dear* friends, I should say, for I can omit none of you—certainly not this little angel who has captured our hearts, and surely not our distinguished guest, Mr. Klutchem, who has honored us with his presence—befo' I kindle with the torch of my love these little beacons which are to light each one of us on our way until another Christmas season overtakes us ; befo,' I say, these

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

sparks burst into life, I want you to fill yo' glasses (Chad had done that to the brim — even little Katy's) and drink to the health and happiness of the lady on my right, whose presence is always a benediction and whose loyal affection is one of the sweetest treasures of my life ! ”

Everybody except the dear lady stood up—even little Katy—and Aunt Nancy's health was drunk amid her blushes, she remarking to Mr. Klutchem that George would always embarrass her with these too flattering speeches of his, which was literally true, this being the fourth time I had heard similar sentiments expressed in the dear lady's honor.

This formal toast over, the Colonel's whole manner changed. He was no longer the dignified host conducting the feast with measured grace. With a spring in his

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

voice and a certain unrestrained joyousness, he called to Chad to bring him a light for his first lamplighter. Then, with the paper wisp balanced in his hand, he began counting the several candles, peeping into the branches with the manner of a boy.

“One—two—three—fo’—yes, plenty of them, but we are goin’ to begin with the top one. This is yours, Nancy—this little white one on the vehy tip-top. Gentlemen, this top candle is always reserved for Miss Caarter,” and the lighted taper kindled it into a blaze. “Just like yo’ eyes, my dear, burnin’ steadily and warmin’ everybody,” and he tapped her hand caressingly with his fingers. “And now, where is that darlin’ little Katy’s—she must have a white one, too—here it is. Oh, what a brave little candle! Not

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

a bit of sputterin' or smoke. See, dearie, what a beautiful blaze ! May all your life be as bright and happy. And here is Mr. Klutchem's right alongside of Katy's—a fine red one. There he goes, steady and clear and strong. And Fitz—dear old Fitz. Let's see what kind of a candle Fitz should have. Do you know, Fitz, if I had my way, I'd light the whole tree for you. One candle is absurd for Fitz ! There, Fitz, it's off—another red one ! All you millionaires must have red candles ! And the Major ! Ah, the Major ! ”—and he held out his hand to me—“ Let's see—yaller ? No, that will never do for you, Major. Pink ? That's better. There now, see how fine you look and how evenly you burn—just like yo' love, my dear boy, that never fails me.”

The circle of the table was now com-

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

plete ; each guest had a candle alight, and each owner was studying the several wicks as if the future could be read in their blaze : Aunt Nancy with a certain seriousness. To her the custom was not new ; the memories of her life were interwoven with many just such top candles,—one I knew of myself, that went out long, long ago, and has never been rekindled since.

The Colonel stopped, and for a moment we thought he was about to take his seat, although some wicks were still unlighted—his own among them.

Instantly a chorus of voices went up : “ You have forgotten your own, Colonel—let me light this one for you,” etc., etc. Even little Katy had noticed the omission, and was pulling at my sleeve to call attention to the fact : the Colonel’s candle was the only one she really cared for.



Each guest had a candle alight.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

“One minute—” cried the Colonel. “Time enough; the absent ones fust”—and he stooped down and peered among the branches—“yes,—that’s just the very one. This candle, Mr. Klutchem, is for our old Mammy Henny, who is at Caarter Hall, carin’ for my property, and who must be pretty lonely to-day—ah, there you go, Mammy!—blazin’ away like one o’ yo’ own fires!”

Three candles now were all that were left unlighted; two of them side by side on the same branch, a brown one and a white one, and below these a yellow one standing all alone.

The Colonel selected a fresh taper, kindled it in the flame of Aunt Nancy’s top candle, and turning to Chad, who was standing behind his chair, said:

“I’m goin’ to put you, Chad, where you

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

belong,—right alongside of me. Here, Katy darlin', take this taper and light this white candle for me, and I'll light the brown one for Chad," and he picked up another taper, lighted it, and handed it to the child.

"Now!"

As the two candles flashed into flame, the Colonel leaned over, and holding out his hand to the old servant—boys together, these two, said in a voice full of tenderness:

"Many years together, Chad,—many years, old man."

Chad's face broke into a smile as he pressed the Colonel's hand:

"Thank ye, marster," was all he trusted himself to say—a title the days of freedom had never robbed him of—and then he turned his head to hide the tears.

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

During this whole scene little Jim had stood on tip-toe, his eyes growing brighter and brighter as each candle flashed into a blaze. Up to the time of the lighting of the last guest candle his face had expressed nothing but increasing delight. When, however, Mammy Henny's candle, and then Chad's were kindled, I saw an expression of wonderment cross his features which gradually settled into one of profound disappointment.

But the Colonel had not yet taken his seat. He had relighted the taper—this time from Mammy Henny's candle—and stood with it in his hand, peering into the branches as if looking for something he had lost.

“Ah, here's another. I wonder—who—this—little—yaller—candle—can—be—for,” he said slowly, looking around the

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

room and accentuating each word. "I reckon they're all here—Let me see—Aunt Nancy, Mr. Klutchem, Katy, Fitz, the Major, Mammy Henny, Chad, and me—Yes—all here—Oh!!" and he looked at the boy with a quizzical smile on his face—"I came vehy near forgettin'.

"This little yaller candle is Jim's."

.

When it was all over; and Aunt Nancy herself had tied on Katy's hat and tucked the tippet into her neck, and buttoned her coat so that not a breath of cold air could get inside; and when Jim stood holding Mr. Klutchem's hat in the hall, with Chad but a few feet away; and when Mr. Klutchem had said good-by to Aunt Nancy, and had turned to take the extended hand of the Colonel, I heard the banker say, in a voice as if a tear had choked it:

COLONEL CARTER'S CHRISTMAS

“Carter, you’re mighty good stuff and I like you. What you’ve taught me to-night I’ll never forget. Katy never had a mother, and I know now she’s never had a home. Good night.”

“Come, Katy, I guess I’ll carry you, little girl—” and he picked up the child, wound her reluctant arms about his neck, and went out into the night.

Date Due

[illegible]

mm
115

PS 2864
C6
1903

ST. OLAF COLLEGE

PS2864 .C6 1903

Smith, Francis - Colonel Carter's Christmas by F.



2 0111 00288 8104